

EMBODYING DECOLONIZATION IN A SETTLER FAITH COMMUNITY  
THE LIVING JUSTLY IN THIS LAND CURRICULUM

By

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## Abstract

The curriculum project *Living Justly in this Land* seeks to spark a conversation among primarily non-Indigenous adults who live in a country with a history of settler colonialism. This curriculum is based on theories from the place-based education model of Land education, which has been created primarily by Indigenous scholars. Inspired by teaching styles used by many different Indigenous peoples, as well as the research method of Participatory Action Research, this living curriculum was co-created during the process of the project. I authored the basic structure of the lessons, but allowed the participants, from a majority white settler faith community, to help guide and add to the conversation with their input. The result of this five-week project was a 53-page curriculum with participant-provided thoughts, reflections, and resources for further learning.

Keywords: Indigenous, Cross-Cultural Education, Decolonization, Environmental Education, Racial Justice, Place-Based Education, Land Education, Progressive Religion



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## Introduction

The purpose of this curriculum project is to critically examine historical and present trajectories of settler and Indigenous relationships to the land and to explore what an Indigenous-led future of decolonization could look like in partnership with one faith community, through a participatory action-informed curriculum. The initial setting of this project was a semi-multicultural, open and affirming, progressive faith community, located in a politically progressive city in the United States. Many members of this faith community are leaders in environmental, racial, LGBTQ+, and economic justice efforts throughout the city. Each Sunday during the fall, winter, and spring months, the church community offers an adult education hour, mostly led by church members in their respective professional fields. This hour is similar to the adult Sunday school time of most churches, but is not limited to the study of the Bible; rather, it is a time to holistically examine what it means to live out faith in the real world.

This setting proved to be an ideal space to critically examine the history of colonization in every aspect of our communities and to begin to incorporate the lens of decolonization in our lived experiences as well as our social and environmental justice efforts. Through the design and application of a participatory curriculum, I sought to answer the following questions:

- What is Indigenous-led decolonization and why is it something that should be pursued?  
How have others, maybe calling it something different, participated in purposeful actions of decolonization or Land education (Calderon, 2014)? What did it look like?
- What elements and participation should a five-week curriculum include that could represent a starting point towards encouraging decolonization and Land education in a community?

- What are some of the possible pitfalls, offenses, or microaggressions (Sue & Sue, 2016) that can be avoided in this process? How can genuine decolonized engagement happen without it being, or seeming to be, merely an attempt to reconcile settler or white guilt?
- How does this fit into the greater research? Who would be interested in this besides me? What are possible outcomes of this curriculum and what practical next steps could be taken towards creating a decolonized Indigenous-settler future in my community?

### **Rationale**

Prominent researchers in several academic disciplines, including Indigenous studies (Aikau, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2007), place-based/environmental education (Bang et al., 2014; Calderon, 2014; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014), and decolonization theory (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012), all converge in a common refrain, critiquing the current settler-dominated society and pointing to the need for a decolonized future. This radical call is to deconstruct and dismantle white supremacy and Western hegemonic thought within education, land management practices, government, and the economy. In an attempt to further dismantle what Sium et al. (2012) refer to as the false divide between action and theory—activist and academic—in decolonization efforts, this project will simultaneously be actively educating organizers, as well as building participatory theories of what lived decolonization looks like.

My hope is for this project to serve as a case study of one small, mostly white community's efforts to move towards decolonization in their everyday lives, social justice efforts, and interactions in the city. The rationale of using this particular community is that it is one that has been awakened to much of the interconnectivity of justice efforts surrounding racial, environmental, social, economic, and LGBTQ+ issues. However, some have yet to fully grasp

one more facet of this interconnectedness: that of the Indigenous peoples' rights and connection to this land. I dare to say that decolonization is not merely one more facet of the myriad anti-oppression efforts, but rather without “material decolonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2012), complete justice in all other anti-oppression efforts will never be fully realized. Material decolonization can be defined as settlers' recognition of—and reparation toward—Indigenous claims to land rights, sovereignty, self-determination, and justice (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Material decolonization has been differentiated from the oft-proclaimed goal of the verb “to decolonize,” which often amounts to nothing more than token or philosophical changes in a system such as education, without effectuating actual change in the Western hegemony of underlying power structures (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The holistic epistemologies and worldviews—or what Foucault (1972) and Kuokkanen (2007) have called “epistemes”—of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island/Abya Yala have long held the potential to address the current epidemics of environmental degradation and inequities surrounding race, gender identity, and economy (Andrzejewski, 2005; Goldtooth, 2010). Sadly, many leading voices of environmental and social justice efforts have unintentionally left out Indigenous voices, thereby creating a neo-colonial structure that further erases Indigenous peoples and their claims to the land (Egan, 2013; Haluza-Delay, DeMoor, & Peet, 2013). Furthermore, attempts to “re-inhabit” the land by the appropriation of Native symbols, agricultural practices, art, and spirituality also insult and undermine Indigenous efforts to materially decolonize (Morgenson, 2009). Without a critical examination of the notion of re-inhabitation (Greenwood, 2013), place-based educational efforts might amount to nothing more than furthering “settler emplacement” that problematically centers settler futurity (Tuck,

McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). Settler emplacement co-opts Indigenous practices in an effort to live in an idealized pluralistic future that leaves out the necessity to address material decolonization. This curriculum project seeks to explore how members of the settler population could work towards material decolonization and how Indigenous-guided models like Land education might serve as pedagogical resources towards that end.

A note on my writing format. In keeping with the majority of the writers in the fields of Indigenous and racial justice studies, I capitalize people groups and ethnicities that denote nationhood or identity. Thus, I capitalize “Indigenous” and “Black,” but not “white” or “settler,” as it is generally understood that white people do not identify with these terms as much as they do “American” or “British.” This is not to show preference to one group, while degrading another. It is simply trying to remain consistent with the logic of capitalization of proper nouns. Please see Visconti (2009) for a more thorough explanation of this justification.

In keeping with the Indigenous research methodology of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008), my voice throughout this report and curriculum will shift between that of an academic and that of a friend and relative discussing important matters. This shift will be particularly apparent in the participants’ responses and contributions to the curriculum. I have included the voices of the participants unedited and in context. For ease of transferability, the names of participants will not be included in this report, but readers may request more information as to the context of what was shared and I will be happy to attempt to contact the participants for further clarification should the reader desire. Also, though I did not add or eliminate any significant information in the reflections, in order for ease of reading and keeping

within the parameters of this project, these reflections are unedited except for correcting typos and changing personal identifiers to “participant”.

### **Personal Rationale**

The centering of Indigenous knowledge and the faith community setting of this project have personal significance to my own professional and personal history of striving for Indigenous rights and justice as a vocational minister. My personal connection to Indigenous peoples perhaps comes from learning of the heritage of my great-grandmother who was Shoshone from Eastern Washington area. I am well aware of the common white claim of “my great-grandmother was an ‘insert tribal name here’ princess.” However, I also have always understood that I have not shared in any personal history of family identity, connection to land, or similar experiences of marginalization of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, though I personally find some portion of my identity and ideology comparable with many Indigenous cosmologies and with Indigenous struggle for sovereignty, I also fully recognize my white identity as a colonial settler and that I benefit daily from white privilege (Sue & Sue, 2016). With this recognition, I also realize my responsibility to work, together with Indigenous peoples and other people of color, toward dismantling systems of oppression that create white privilege as much as I can in my lifetime.

My journey of awareness of colonization began during my 10-year career of being a critical-thinking evangelical Christian missionary in Latin America. I had learned of the historical Christian-erasure of the Indigenous identity of converts in Abya Yala (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), and sought to encourage autonomous cultural expressions in Indigenous churches throughout the continent. In my efforts, I used applied ethnomusicology to facilitate Indigenous

authorship and recording of traditional music, dances, and stories about the Creator. Though I received criticism and caution from my church of the dangers of “syncretism”—or “going Native”—I continued further.

This journey, though too long to write about here, led me to the increasing awareness of colonization in its many aspects: religion, land, ideology, economics, government, and elsewhere. I began to educate myself about the history of colonization from a critical theory perspective (Kilgore, 2001; Tuck & Yang, 2012). I also experienced first-hand, the continued sufferings of Indigenous peoples under colonization. I saw how poverty—economic and cultural—was a direct result of the removal of Indigenous lands and ways of life. In one Indigenous language that I was learning, they did not even have a word for “poverty” in their vocabulary until colonization. That is because poverty did not exist as we know it today. According to Ngäbe Elder Victoriano Bejerano (2015), before the effects of colonization were felt in his region of what is known today as the country of Panama, his people never had want for food or shelter. People who acted with greed were publicly called out and widows were taken in by family. Because the word for “poor” in his language did not exist, the word today has been transliterated from the Spanish word “pobre,” which comes out as “bäbre” (Bejerano, 2015).

Over time, my efforts shifted from ethnomusicology to culturally sustainable community development and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge, partnering with Indigenous community leaders to create long-term projects that would encourage cultural regeneration and wellness. Some of this process happened concurrently, and partly as a result of, going back to school to receive my B.A. in Rural Development with a concentration in community research and Indigenous knowledge at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). I continued after that with

my present program, M.Ed. in Cross-Cultural Education. Both of these programs have been heavily influenced by Alaska Native researchers and allies in efforts of decolonization (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). With my recent international move back to the United States, my vision is to transform the empire from within by using my privilege as a citizen of the empire whose neoliberal policies are negatively affecting Indigenous and marginalized peoples globally, and work towards dismantling unjust systems in every aspect of society that I can. Though this goal sounds lofty, it is what drives my desire to begin in the places where I have influence. At this time, I have been given influence in my faith community to begin this discussion.

### **Educational Rationale**

Though I will touch on it here, the educational rationale will be made clearer through the theoretical perspective and literature review of this proposal. I was most inspired to follow this path of decolonization by the similar refrains found in much Indigenous research and decolonization literature: the call for an Indigenous-led decolonized future that is truly democratic and includes the voices of all humans, as well as the earth and all that inhabits it (Aikau, 2015; Bang et al., 2014). As I was inspired by this call, I longed for stories of how we might walk toward this vision and what the first step might be. Through research, I found that there is not only one path towards decolonization (Tuck, 2008), rather there are as many paths as there are colonized systems. I also longed to understand my role, as a white male educator, in walking toward this future. I was emboldened by the research of European-decent New Zealander, Canadian, and American settler allies (Brown, 2011; Egan, 2015; Johnston, 2015) who explained that it is not the job of Indigenous peoples or people of color to educate their oppressors in how to decolonize. I saw it as my role to assist other settlers to open their eyes—as

mine continue to be opened—and work towards material decolonization, which goes beyond philosophical rhetoric and “settler moves towards innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Moving from the general calls of decolonization towards the specific field of education, I have been most influenced by Mexican and Tigua place-based education researcher Delores Calderon and Sámi critical researcher of higher education Rauna Kuokkanen. Calderon (2014) explained the need to “make visible and begin to address the inherent contradictions of settler colonialism within [environmental] education, as well as that of wider educational systems, priorities and processes” (p. 33). Using the common Indigenous value of reciprocal giving as an analogy, Kuokkanen (2007) insisted that places of higher education must “do the work” to decolonize and dismantle Western-dominated academia in order to be worthy of receiving “the gift” of Indigenous ways of knowing.

I believe that this curriculum project with my faith community will not only prepare me to work towards decolonization in my future career after receiving my degree, but will hopefully assist congregants towards decolonization in their own educational efforts. Interestingly, there are many members of my faith community that work in education whom my curriculum project could inspire. Furthermore, there are many prominent leaders of environmental justice and advocacy in my congregation who might be interested in the pedagogy of Land education (Calderon, 2016; McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie, 2016). Thus, my aim is to inspire a snowball effect through a participatory action-inspired curriculum. The curriculum outlined in this paper, co-created with participants over the course of five weeks, can be revisited by other churches or activist groups, creating a conversation that continues to grow and progress towards material decolonization.



## Theoretical Perspective

This curriculum project is grounded in multiple streams of critical theory (Kilgore, 2001), intersectional theory (Cho et al., 2013), decolonization theory (Tuck and Yang, 2012), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and participatory inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997), as well as influences by social-psychological theories such as spiral dynamics (Beck & Cowan, 1996) and the holistic interconnected-reality paradigms of many Indigenous researchers (Kawagley, 2006; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

As stated in the rationale, my pedagogical interest draws heavily upon Dolores Calderon (2014) and the Land education model that itself stemmed from academic efforts towards the decolonization of place-based and environmental education (Bang et al., 2014; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). My academic interest is also inspired by the work of Rauna Kuokkanen (2009), which provides a clear path and behavior with which settler institutions should follow to be worthy of the gift of Indigenous epistemologies. There have been numerous calls for similar positive Indigenous-settler futures in multiple disciplines (Aikau, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). These voices encourage the decolonization of all current settler institutions, but only a few provide relevant curriculum or case studies that provide clear examples to follow. I have been motivated to create this curriculum after recognizing the dearth of curricular examples that could address decolonization among settler adult learners, especially in the unique context of a faith community. I believe the Christian church is a compelling—albeit historically ironic—space to mobilize settlers towards decolonization in this project.

## **Literature Review**

This brief review of the literature will be thematically organized as follows. First, I will explain my rationale for teaching on Indigenous issues as a non-Indigenous person. Second, I will cite literature by Indigenous researchers calling for a decolonized future. Third, I will explore the theory of land education.

### **Settler-Educating-Settler Model**

Throughout the literature regarding social justice movements, including movements for Indigenous rights, one can find the common refrain that marginalized peoples should not be expected to educate their oppressors about their own oppression (Blaque, 2015; Smith, 2015). Through examining several primary research projects regarding a member of the settler population educating other members of the settler population about issues of colonization, I found three key resources. New Zealander settler—or Pākehā—researcher Michael Brown (2011) sought to demonstrate individual pathways towards addressing the problem of Pākehā decolonization. The demonstration of his Pākehā-educating-Pākehā strategy showed that educating those in power, about both their participation in systemic oppression and the holistic benefits of Māori Indigenous knowledge, can effect change in all levels of society.

White feminist researcher Krista Johnston (2011) explored the intersectionality of feminist issues with the goals of decolonization and demonstrated spaces in which non-Indigenous peoples could follow the lead of Indigenous activists. Gabrielle Ester Egan (2015) critically examined her multiple positionings as a Queer Jewish settler and intersectional feminist in her thesis. Egan (2015) provided a checklist of reflective questions that intersectional blog

writers can ask themselves before publishing an article in order to honor Indigenous voices and recognize the need for decolonization of the blogosphere.

These readings gave me confidence and a sense of responsibility to educate other settlers of the histories and contemporary realities of our complicity in colonialist structures. It also lends authority to my research idea to develop a curriculum that seeks to add Indigenous voices to the intersectional discourse and to decolonize the thinking and action around racial, social, gender, immigration, and environmental justice in my faith community.

### **Decolonized Futures**

In their groundbreaking work, critical theorists and educational researchers Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) show how the wide acceptance of turning the word “decolonize” into a verb, has resulted in many “settler moves to innocence” that provided a remedy for “white guilt,” by including multicultural or Indigenous themes in education, without acknowledging the need to critically analyze and deconstruct the current hegemonic settler system. It is one of the main assumptions of my final project that the triad of settler colonialism—Indigenous land theft and identity erasure; settler who never leaves; and chattel slavery—is the historical framework of our society and very much continues to this day, though it is invisible to most (McCoy, 2014). As referenced before, material decolonization is an overarching project and vision that seeks settler recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, a centering of Indigenous values, and co-creating a world of true democracy for all peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012)

Aikau (2015) used Native Hawaiian storytelling in the essay that recounted her professional and spiritual awakening during a field experience with a cross-cultural group of her Hawaiian political science students, accompanied by First Nations students from Canada. In a

symbolic act that is referred to as Indigenous Resurgence, Aikau told of her tumultuous ocean journey from the island of Maui to the uninhabited island of Kaho'olawe. Written using Indigenous ontological framework, Aikau used this story to propose alternative futures for a “trans-Indigenous and settler” society that is not solely determined or governed by a capitalist, colonialist state that “uses global capital and military power to oppress” (p. 659). The beautiful quote in the closing paragraph sums up why this article is important to my project: “I am asking that we look to an ontology as old as life itself for a new way of being in the world” (p. 659).

### **Land Education**

The study of place-based education is a convergence of environmental, psychological, and pedagogical studies (Sobel, 2005). However, in the past decade, some place-based notions such as place attachment (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014) have been critically examined and found lacking in their inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies (McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie, 2016). Berg (2005) spoke of how people could become “re-inhabitants” to their bioregion, dwelling in a holistic way, much like Indigenous groups did before and after the majority settler population arrived. Greenwood (2013) as well as Graham (2007) advocated for a “critical pedagogy of place” as the way forward towards a place-conscious and culturally responsive settler/Indigenous re-inhabitation. However, some Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in the field of place-based education have challenged the very notion of settler re-inhabitation of Indigenous land, wondering if the goal of settler re-inhabitation—especially without acknowledging the need for material decolonization—is commensurable with Indigenous decolonization (Bang et al., 2014; Morgensen, 2009; Tuck et al., 2014).

In describing the revolutionary land education model, Delores Calderon (2014) calls for a decolonization of “settler colonial relations attached to current pedagogical models of place” (p. 24). The land education model represents a holistic view that draws upon critical pedagogy of place, affirming the need for place-based educators to “think about what non-colonial relations might look like both in theory and practice” (Calderon, 2014, p. 28). Much of Calderon’s work moves towards a beginning practical application of encouraging students to consider the cultural aspects of place and work towards a decolonized future as suggested by prominent authors in critical pedagogy of place (Calderon, 2014; Engel-Di Mauro & Carroll, 2013; Kortweg & Oakley, 2013; Lowan-Trudeau, 2013; Tuck, et al., 2014). I use the theoretical framework employed in land education all throughout the curriculum.

### **Statement of Bias**

To the end of describing the ontology of the social reality of my research interest, I wish to attempt to explain my personal ontology as a starting point. My ontology includes a non-dualistic, collective reality-creating paradigm that is concerned with “human flourishing” (Heron and Reason, 1997). Heron and Reason (1997) conceptualize “human flourishing” as both an ethic of inquiry, as well as an all-encompassing axiology that seeks the thriving of people as autonomous members of communities, and in relationship with others and the environment. I concur that human flourishing is both collective and individual and that there are sociocultural, historical, and spiritual-informed paths that should be used towards a shared societal equality, historical justice—or ‘right-making’, as well as reparative actions that restore environmental, social, physical, and spiritual balance.

As an historical and moral responsibility, settlers—the descendants of initial colonizing powers who still benefit from societal privilege—have created and participated in, to the exclusion of all other cultural paradigms, a capitalist and hierarchical world society that benefits the elite settlers and impoverishes all others, including non-human entities, creating a globe that has been set on a trajectory towards what some are calling the unsustainable “Anthropocene Age” (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). The Indigenous Peoples of Earth have historically been left out of the privilege of state-building of the so-called post-colonial era of the 20th Century (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). To this day, they continue to possess a comparatively limited voice in how the land—sacred and containing spiritual qualities—has and still continues to be treated.

In questions of epistemology, the social reality that I have explored in this project is concerned with creating understanding through participatory paradigms and decolonized place-based education inquiry, centering decolonized methodologies. My general research interest is exploring what it would look like for settlers to seek Indigenous peoples’ lead toward material decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

### **Methods for Curriculum Project**

The philosophy behind the co-creation of this curriculum draws upon the constructivist methodologies of Participatory Action Research—or PAR—(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) and participant observation, as well as Indigenous methodologies such as the talking circle (Cardinal, 2001; Forest, 2000; Graveline, 1998), relational accountability (Wilson, 2008), and influences of Yupiaq and Māori Research paradigms (Kawagley, 2006; Smith, 1999). Though I did not conduct original research using a typical PAR method, I was influenced and inspired by a critical Indigenous examination of PAR (Tuck, 2008) in the creation, co-creation, and examination of a

curriculum for the adults in my faith community. Tuck (2008) examined PAR as a collaborative means toward social change and described the typically assumed paradoxical theories of change inherent in PAR—that of reform or revolution. Using Indigenous epistemologies, Tuck (2008) offered four alternative vantage points through which change could occur: “sovereignty, contention, balance, and relationship” (p. 49). For this project, I seek to move toward the vantage point of contention. This is described by Tuck in the following passage:

Contention can be understood as a theory of change that the process of colonization has tried to extinguish through fear and shame, but, when embraced, can yield justice and peace. How is it that contention brings peace? It is a process, purposeful and deliberate, that can happen across long and short spans of time. Contention is a process of individual and collective self-education. (Tuck, 2008, p. 57)

Education on decolonization, going against the status quo of our current Western hegemonic society, will be considered contentious to many. However, the radical thrust toward social justice embedded within the historical roots of the Christian church make the faith community an appropriate space to begin this conversation. Tuck (2008) quotes Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred on this point: “The process of gaining knowledge (what we call ‘education’) is a radical action, an act of defiance against conventional reality. Education, in this sense, defines a warrior” (Alfred 2005, p. 149, as cited in Tuck, 2008, p.57).

The setting of this curriculum project is a vibrant, multigenerational progressive Christian congregation called Land of the Sky United Church of Christ. This setting was selected for many reasons. First, it is the faith community that I am a member of. Second, the church and the UCC denomination as a whole have a history of passionately working toward social justice. Third, it is

comprised of a majority of white people, among other cultural groups, who are acquainted with the history of systemic racial, economic, and gender injustices. The setting is one that is open to the topic of decolonization. This curriculum is not meant for a group of students or participants that require convincing of the merits of decolonization, but that are open to discussing how to practically work toward decolonization as a community.

As this is a non-thesis curriculum project, it was not my intent to study the individual participants per se, but rather evaluate the progress made towards answering my project questions. The participants were adult voluntary students who chose to stay after the main worship time to come to the adult education hour. These participants chose to attend the classes for several possible reasons: because they had a specific interest in decolonization, because they routinely attend all adult education classes, or because they decided to on a whim. I recommended that if participants attend the first Sunday, that they would try to attend the subsequent weeks as well. The curriculum was designed to benefit participants and the greater conversation on decolonization whether they attended once or all five times.

I was inspired by the method of Participatory Action Research in the development, application, and evaluation of my five-Sunday curriculum. PAR has a social justice focus that sees research not just for academics, but also for practical and real change in current institutions and systems (Creswell, 2015). PAR is a Western—though it has been informed by non-Western influences—research model that seems to be compatible with Indigenous methodologies of research. The circular focus as—opposed to square or linear; the collective nature of participation; and the emancipation aspects of PAR all seem to lend themselves well to research conducted towards decolonization. PAR has been demonstrated as compatible within



decolonization frameworks (Tuck, 2008), multicultural education (Irizarry, 2009), and faith-based community education (Lambert-Pennington, 2010).

The curriculum, which references much of the relevant literature in my study, was designed to be less of a directive lesson plan and more of a series of contemplative question prompts for a Talking Circle; shared narratives via multimedia and guest Native speakers; and suggestions for further readings throughout the weeks. The participants' feedback helped shaped the way one lesson moved to the next, with the hope that these five meeting times would morph into a force for decolonization in our faith community and in our city. The post-project possibilities for this curriculum could take the form of a decolonization focus for the current church racial justice committee, or even develop into a new non-profit in the city. I became a participant observer for the times that I was not directing the class. During these times I reflected upon what was being discussed and incorporated my thoughts, as well as the thoughts of other participants in my final analysis.

The curriculum was created and initiated in mid-September and finished by mid-November. Prior to this project, I collected resources for the curriculum based on thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) of resources from my literature review, the literature from past Cross-Cultural Education classes at UAF, and any other written or multimedia resources that I came across. I used the qualitative method of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in a mini research project in preparation for gathering inspiring video excerpts for my curriculum project. I chose this method because it allowed me to create language indicators found in the audio of the media or the bio of the video author. The results of that research produced 11 quality videos that naturally seemed to form into four categories: history and definition of (de)colonialism;

interconnectivity of decolonization and social justice; decolonization and environmental advocacy/land education; and practical settler steps towards allied decolonization. These four categories gave me a framework from which to organize my original four adult education classroom times, which subsequently turned into five.

My final project report takes the form of a narrative of the five lessons. This narrative includes the lesson structure, the input of the participants, and my reflection after each lesson. My inclusion of participants' unedited responses could be criticized as merely including raw data to make the curriculum more substantial; however, my intent is to communicate the relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) and co-creation aspects of this curriculum as a conversation in its original contexts.

In my final reflection, I analyze and discuss the most common themes that the participants contributed to the class times, as well as how the project addressed my initial questions of inquiry. I made my draft report available to participants for them to add or subtract anything for accuracy or enrichment. Several weeks after the curriculum project, the participants agreed to meet together to discuss the next steps in moving towards decolonization as a faith community and identify one date to gather a core group that would be dedicated to lead the faith community in sustaining the impetus of this project. I was also able to present the project narrative report before the Racial Justice Team at our church. They were extremely excited and encouraged at what had taken place. Please see the timeline for the entire project in Appendix A.

Prior to this project, I did not anticipate any major problems. However, I was prepared to deal with the push back and the many common reactions of settler guilt when presented with such seemingly radical information about decolonization. I addressed these reactions with

sensitivity and understanding, providing time to discuss these matters during class, if shared by the whole group. I also made myself available to talk about it after the class if it was of a more personal nature. Furthermore, I was prepared for some unforeseen circumstances such as if a special guest may not be available to speak or we ran out of time because of lively discussion. Inadvertently, both of these things happened: two guest speakers canceled and we frequently felt cut short because of how vibrant the conversation was. Regarding the planned guest speakers, one was able to come after the project. Her presentation is included in my final report as well.

As stated, this project was designed to be participatory, action-based and was flexible to mold and change to most benefit the group. That being said, I as a moderator was vigilant when certain participants tended to dominate too much of the discussion and encouraged them—indirectly or through humor—to allow others a chance to respond.

This qualitative curriculum project is limited to the time and place that it occurred and is not meant to be for any empirical application of theory. However, my hope is that this practical application of working towards decolonization in a majority-white community will serve as a model for those who would like to walk in the direction of decolonization, but do not know how to take the first step. The title of this curriculum is *Living Justly in this Land*.

In keeping with narrative flow of this report, in the following section where I present this curriculum project, I will also be adding my own reflection and a discussion as facilitator after each lesson. This section will be followed by a general reflection and discussion of the entire project.



## **Living Justly in this Land**

### **Introduction**

The title of this curriculum is a nod to the vision statement of the church that it was first developed in: “Live justly; love abundantly; walk humbly.” It also represents the curriculum creators’ desire for these lesson plans: to help participants seek to live and relate to the Land—capitalized to denote its sacredness—where we are settlers in a way that recognizes past wrongdoings and seeks to live out justice in tangible ways. This five-part curriculum is designed to be an ever-evolving conversation. The idea was to develop a co-created lesson plan that might be continually built upon as more voices are added to it.

The original co-creators of this curriculum began this conversation in a mostly-white, progressive faith community in the heart of ceded Cherokee Land. It is meant to be adapted to a variety of contexts, added to, and passed on. This first version of the curriculum was developed in a setting of five, one-hour-long lessons, but could easily have taken up four times that amount of time if the time had permitted for longer discussions.

Most lessons are organized into different parts, including: an introduction, video links, discussion questions, reading materials, and reflection questions. Participants’ responses will be included at the end of each lesson. In this instance, the responses will be included in two separate sections: summary of class notes and e-mail correspondence. The class notes will be a random collection of thoughts shared during our short discussion times. These thoughts were taken down shorthand as people spoke.

In order to respect the initial participants’ privacy, we decided not to record and transcribe the lessons. For this reason, no names will be included in these notes. Similarly, we will include

e-mail communication of participants' responses after each week. These are a bit easier to decipher, and will give future participants more resources for further understanding.

## Lesson 1 “What is (De)Colonization?”

### Lesson Aim

The aim of this lesson is to provide a brief introduction to the topic of decolonization, a history of settler colonialism, and contextualizing it to the locale of the teaching. Though this is a participatory curriculum, in order to provide sufficient context to the topic, this lesson will be primarily taught in a Western traditional manner of teacher and student.

**Time/Duration 0.5 - 1 hr.**

### Lesson Materials

- History of Indigenous Peoples: Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdzTdve1n7c>
- Links to Treaties related to the land around Asheville, NC
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Hopewell#Cherokee\\_treaty\\_terms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Hopewell#Cherokee_treaty_terms)
  - <http://www.tngenweb.org/cessions/17851128.html>
  - <http://www.tngenweb.org/cessions/cherokee.html>
- “Embodying Decolonization in a Settler Faith Community” (Henry, 2016, *Introduction*)

### Lesson Background

This introductory lesson is instrumental in demystifying the topic of decolonization. It provides definitions, a generalized history of settler colonialism, a contextualized history of place, and respectful introductory protocols (i.e. recognizing ceded Indigenous lands). Portions of the lesson in *italics* should be read aloud, however it is the decision of the facilitator how much of the script is included in the lesson.

## Definitions

- Colonialism: The establishment of a colony in one land by a political power from another land, and the maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony.
- Settler Colonial Triad: Erasure and silencing of Indigenous Peoples; chattel slavery and devaluing of black and brown persons; foreign colonizing powers that settle and did not leave during the era of “decolonization.” (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

## Lesson Activities

**Introductory protocol.** In order to give proper honor to the Land and the rightful caretakers of it, it is important to begin with recognizing the history of the Land, even before introducing the topic. Here, facilitator should do a short investigative report about the history of the Land and colonization to localize the introduction. This example takes place in East Asheville, North Carolina. Text in brackets should be replaced with localized research of historical treaties, land grabs, or unceded territory of Indigenous Peoples in teaching area. Try to make it as local as possible, down to the land the property sits on.

*[Before I begin, I would like to recognize something very important. The US invaded this land, which, though it was supposedly protected under the British Royal Proclamation that divided the Blue Ridge Escarpment, was forcibly settled immediately after the Revolutionary War. We are standing on broken treaty land that represents at least three direct broken promises of the US government with the Cherokee nation (The US broke more than 36 treaties with the Cherokee in this area, all before Removal, a.k.a. the Trail of Tears).*

*Before the treaty of Hopewell, 1785, this land (up to Swannanoa) represented the Eastern border of the Cherokee nation. After the treaty, the Swanannoa settlement land was given to*



*settlers and the hills west of Tunnel Road was the new border of the Cherokee Nation . . . for less than 6 years. In the treaty of Holston, 1791, all of present day Buncombe county, Madison county, and parts of surrounding counties were stolen by the U.S. government. Now, Cherokee land . . . which itself is an amazing story of Cherokee survivance . . . is reduced to a small speck comprising mainly the town of Cherokee on the Qualla boundary.]*

*So we are standing on ceded Indigenous land that was given up because of fear mongering, manipulation, deceit, greed, blind piety, treachery, and violence. Though wealth and glory fueled this land theft, the alien colonizers used their god to justify it through such foreign concepts as the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny. Which is why it is ironic, some 500 years after initial contact, that this conversation is happening in a Christian church. Some would say it should happen here; others might say it must happen here.*

**Facilitator introduction.** In keeping with many Indigenous cosmologies, orators should introduce themselves, their histories, and make themselves known, before they are worthy of being listened to. Here the facilitator should introduce herself, her family lineage if appropriate, and why this topic is personal and important to her. Take time to do this portion well.

**Course content introduction.** The following text should be read, or loosely taught from, adding in the facilitator's perspective and stories. Stories and anecdotes from the facilitator will be very necessary.

*During the course of these next five weeks, we will uncover, through historical and contemporary analysis, how settler colonialism—a unique brand of colonialism that occurs in very few places on earth—is at the root of most of our social, racial, and environmental problems. And what we can practically do to reverse it.*

*This will not be a typical class. As we are seeking to open our eyes to decolonize every aspect of our lives, I am also seeking to decolonize the format of this class. We will meet in a circle, which is eternal. Not one of us is of greater importance to the Creator. We will take turns talking. I have some questions to get us started, but these can be changed or added to.*

*I know this topic will bring up a lot of feelings and some of you, especially those of you who are good at expressing yourselves will do so at length. I wish we had hours and hours for this, and I wish our society did not quantify and monetize time, but, unfortunately that is the current paradigm we live in.*

*I will never cut you off but please be mindful of people who are practicing being listeners and not always talkers. It is important to hear from everyone. If you normally talk quite a bit, wait until at least five other people have had a say, before you speak up. [This is what I try to do, because I always have an immediate response. I learned this from the Indigenous peoples of Panama.]*

*Also we will be attempting to use a participatory action co-creation of a curriculum. We have so many amazing people in our faith community, doing so many amazing things. I want to create a curriculum that includes your insight, your suggestions, and your stories.*

*What is Decolonization? Well first of all, we need to define colonialism, then we need to define settler colonialism. Colonialism is the establishment of a colony in one land by a political power from another land, and the subsequent maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony.*

*Myth of post-colonialism: After the British empire, pulling out of Africa, pulling out of South-East Asia, (not yet pulling out of island territories...) “They” declared the end of empires*

*and the beginning of “states,” but some nations got left out of state-building: Indigenous peoples.*

*And some nations got ripped apart and divided, grouped with warring nations and were told they were now a sovereign state (i.e. states in sub-Saharan Africa). To top that off they were expected to thrive as an “enlightened” Westernized nation, to sort of “play European.” But instead they, as would be expected, went through the effects of hundreds of years of colonial trauma and destruction of cultural knowledge and identity.*

*This was all happening post-WWII, which was also the beginnings of the Cold War. Thus first world nation (USA and allies), second world nations (Communist), and those that did not align themselves because they would not—or proved unable to—economically contribute in some way. Thus, they were called: third world nations.*

*There were another group of people that have been largely forgotten about until now: Indigenous peoples, fourth world nations Now who are Indigenous peoples? They are sovereign nations who have their own unique culture, language, traditions, and lands, who were not part of state-building and their lands were and are still being occupied by a foreign nation, or another propped-up Indigenous nation or ethnic group that was given state authority over them.*

### **Question for Reflection**

What is one thing that you understood for the first time or understood in a deeper way today and what new questions has that brought up for you?

### **Final Thought**

A prayer or sentiment recognizing the history shared during the lesson and the need to engage this topic further may be offered.

## **Participatory Response**

There will normally be more feedback in this section, but in the initial run for this curriculum, we were only given 30 minutes for this first lesson, which was not enough time for discussion. Also, we did not receive any e-mail responses during that first week.

## Reflection on Lesson 1

This first week preceding Lesson 1 was a bit stressful as I realized that my non-thesis curriculum project might qualify as research, therefore I would need to get Institution Review Board (IRB) approval from my university. I quickly filled all the forms and hoped to hear back from my graduate committee and from the IRB in time for my first planned teaching Sunday. That did not happen; therefore, I decided I would continue with the teaching to fulfill my obligation, even though the first lesson would not include input from the participants. This ended up working splendidly as this “extra” Sunday that was given to me—I was originally told four, and this made it five Sundays—would only be 30 minutes instead of a full hour. I used that time teaching the above curriculum, answering a few questions, and encouraging participants to sign up for weekly e-mails.

During the week following the first lesson, I received word that the IRB officially recognized that my project did not qualify as research, and that I could continue with my curriculum. For this reason, no names and no identifiable information are included in these responses. I also decided against including the times I spoke with the children at the church about this topic into this curriculum project to avoid complicating this project and stalling it further. However, that is not to discourage any future facilitator to include the topic of decolonization with children. Multiple YouTube videos exist, especially surrounding the children-initiated protests this year at Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota, would be ideal to share with school-aged children about the history of colonization and the struggle for land rights and environmental protection. A side note: proper care should be taken in choosing resources that could potentially produce “ecophobia” (Sobel, 2008) in younger children, or

children who have not developed their Environmental Identity (Clayton, 2003) to the point that they can developmentally process such topics. See Green et. al (2015) for more information.

Though I only had 30 minutes and was not seeking to include participants' responses, I utilized the time to give ample context and history to the topic of decolonization and settler colonialism. This lesson served to interest everyone present to be very excited about this class and come back for the subsequent Sundays. Because it was the first official kick-off for the Fall education series at the church, the worship service was exceptionally full. After the service, the adult education class was meeting in a medium-sized room that quickly proved too small to hold the more than 30 people who had arrived. We were all in a circle, but that circle was getting too big for the room. After I began presenting the curriculum and introduction, I found myself emboldened and speaking passionately about this topic so dear to me. I was heartened by sounds of sadness and disgust when I talked about the historical atrocities and contemporary injustices, and by sounds of agreement and interest as we talked about taking action as a faith community against these injustices.

As I mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, I was ready for common settler responses to decolonization. One of the most common did come up, as someone asked a question towards the end of the class. Her question is paraphrased, "What are we European-descendant people supposed to do then, all leave and move back to Europe? There isn't enough room for us and they wouldn't take us anyway" (personal communication). I assured her that this is a complex and nuanced topic and that as a progressive faith community we believe in engaging in complex issues, challenging ourselves, and working towards justice, even if we do not have concrete answers. I also assured her that Indigenous scholars have noted that Indigenous

cosmologies value diversity of thought and cultural expressions; and that a society with Indigenous leadership, or even equal Indigenous representation, would not treat white people as white people have historically treated them.

After setting up an e-mail sign-up sheet, I received around 15 e-mail addresses. This smaller amount was partly because there was a potluck immediately afterwards, and I think some people forgot to sign up on their way out of the room. I received several positive responses from the attendees. One particular story was from a man who told a story of how he was one quarter Cherokee, though he had no contact with relatives that had taught him about that culture. Therefore he was asking what that meant for him in attempting to address colonialism in his life and how that affected his white identity. We were able to discuss this issue together after the class. I also shared with him about my similar knowledge of my Shoshone heritage, but how I did not grow up with any Shoshone family teaching me about that culture. I told him how I do find myself aligned with many Indigenous values and worldviews, but that I find my identity within my role as an ally with Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. Later that week, I followed up with an e-mail to those who had signed up, which included my curriculum project proposal and some resources to look over for next week's class.





## Lesson 2 “History of (De)Colonization”

### Lesson Aim

Building upon the history and definitions presented in Lesson 1, this lesson will further introduce the topic of decolonization and encourage participant introspection about what it means in today’s contexts.

### Time/Duration: 1-2 hrs

Time can be extended by watching entire linked videos and allowing for longer discussion times.

### Lesson Materials

#### Videos:

- Pre-Colonial Socialism and the Effects of Genocide, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz:
  - <https://youtu.be/GdzTdve1n7c?t=1m14s> until 4:40
  - <https://youtu.be/GdzTdve1n7c?t=5m57s> until 14:48 (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014)
- Eve Tuck, Biting the Hand that Feeds You: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXEEzqIjA3I&feature=youtu.be&t=4m39s> until 8:20 (Tuck, 2015)

### Lesson Background

This lesson attempts to synthesize the project rationale and theoretical perspective into a format that would be understandable and relatable to participants that may be unfamiliar with the academic literature on the topic. For this reason, videos of Indigenous scholars are included to explain history from an Indigenous perspective and definitions of settler colonialism. Without a deeper understanding of settler colonialism, participants will not be able to understand their roles in challenging that negative paradigm or work towards changing it.

## Definitions

These definitions can be printed, cut out, and examined during the lesson activities.

Definitions and readings are taken and adapted from *Unsettling Ourselves: Reflections and Resources for Deconstructing Colonial Mentality* (Unsettling Minnesota, 2009).

- **Capitalism:** The socio-economic system where social relations are based on private ownership and commodity exchange. This system defines the natural world, including humans, simply as a body of resources to be exploited and reshaped to serve the purposes and interests of power. As such, it entails colonization and exploitation of all life forms, land, and the natural environment. Capitalism results in competition for resources, accumulation by dispossession, class structures, involuntary relations, and a coercive hierarchy. Adherents of capitalism trust a god-like “invisible hand of the market” over human guidance of economies.
- **Colonization:** The practice of invading other lands and territories for the purpose of settlement and/or resource exploitation. Colonization exists in four stages: reconnaissance, invasion, occupation, and assimilation. It is comprised of two primary aspects – physical and mental. Colonization also includes the physical occupation of land and the domination of indigenous peoples through military conflicts, genocide, and relocation. Religious, cultural, social, and economic assimilation follows.
- **Fourth World:** In the succession of worlds, including the First World (Capitalist States, i.e. United States, United Kingdom, etc), the Second World (Communist States, i.e. China, Soviet Union, etc), and the Third World (Impoverished States), the Fourth World is the Host World to the Parasitic Worlds of the colonizer. It is the nations of Indigenous

peoples who today are completely or partly deprived of their own territory and its resources. This includes the Native Nations of North and South America, the Sámi people of Northern Scandinavia, the Catalonians in Spain, the Australian aboriginal people, the Maori of New Zealand, as well as the various indigenous populations of Africa, Asia and Oceania. This also included segments of the European population, evidenced in the struggles of the Irish, Welsh, Basques, and others to free themselves from settler-state oppression. The goal of struggle in the Fourth World is often not the creation of a State, but the expulsion of alien rule, the ending of colonization, and the reconstruction of Indigenous societies. [See Barnhardt (1991) for more information about education in Fourth World contexts.]

- Genocide: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
- Hetero-patriarchy: The dominant colonial systems of hetero-normativity and patriarchy, which are inextricably linked in their function as tools used to establish and maintain a colonial state. This term draws attention to the ways in which hetero-normativity and patriarchy intersect one another, reinforce each other, and function together.

Heteropatriarchy is a tool of colonialist and capitalist societies that enforces hierarchical gender oppression (patriarchy) by enforcing a binary gender system in which one is

assigned either male or female identity at birth. Hetero-normativity eliminates the space between male and female and criminalizes disassociation or non-conformity to these gender identities and associated expectations of each gender role. Hetero-patriarchal societies work to give and ensure power and privilege to males and positions females as subordinate to males.

- Indigenism: The political belief that places the rights and struggles of indigenous people as the highest priority in political life. It is an ideology which draws upon the traditions—the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of value—of native peoples to both make critiques of and conceptualize alternatives to the present social, political, and economic status quo. Indigenism offers a vision of how things might be, that is based in how things have been since time immemorial, and how things must be once again if the human species, and perhaps the planet itself, is to survive much longer.
- Settler: All people not Indigenous to North America who are living on this continent are settlers on stolen land. We also acknowledge that the state was founded through genocide and colonization— which continues today and from which settlers directly benefit. However, all settlers do not benefit equally from the colonial state. Not all those residing on this land immigrated here of free will, and while a pronouncedly racist power structure determines who gains the most from Indigenous genocide, it is all of our responsibilities as settlers, especially those of us who descended from European colonizers, to challenge the systems of domination from which we benefit. A way to describe colonizers that highlights their desires to be emplaced on Indigenous land.

- Settler Colonialism: The policy of conquering a land to send settlers in order to shape its demographic contours
- Settler State: A settler state is a state with origins in settler colonialism and is built on settlement. Examples include the United States, Canada, Israel, Australia, South Africa and many other states.
- Spiritual/ Cultural Appropriation: The act of colonizers taking the spiritual and cultural practices of the indigenous peoples whose lands they occupy and claiming it as their own property.

## **Lesson Activities**

### **Lesson preparation.**

- Have a projector/multimedia player and audio/speakers ready.
- Invite one volunteer with a laptop to take notes during group participation in order to record what is said.
- Print and cut out definitions to use in activity #3.

**Introduction.** Recap of last week; talk about this being a co-created curriculum project, that participation is encouraged and will build on the original; revisit the purpose for the course; remind participants of the importance of their e-mail contributions of reflections, ideas, and suggestions.

### **Play video clips (Around 16 minutes).**

**Activity #1.** Turn to your neighbor and take turns asking each other the following questions: “What moved/angered/saddened/surprised you in these videos?” (3-10 minutes)

**Activity #2.** In the large circle, pose the following question to the group and have them respond as they have something to speak: “What kinds of historical connections did you see that tie into contemporary injustices?”

**Activity #3.**

- Break up into smaller groups and assign each of them one or two definitions.
- Adjust the group numbers and definitions for the size of the group.
- Instruct them to:
  - read over the definition as a small group
  - respond to this definition and how it makes them feel
  - personalize this definition by sharing a real life scenario or personal story of how that concept has affected them or someone they love.
- Have someone read the following common colonial responses taken from *Unsettling Minnesota* (2009) and take a time in the talking circle for reflection and response.

*Deconstructing Colonial Mentality: All this awful stuff happened in the past. I didn't personally do it. Why should I pay for what my great, great, great, great uncle did or didn't do—or for people I'm not related to at all? People are just using the past to avoid taking responsibility for their lives now. My grandfather came here with two pennies in his pocket and built a good life; why can't others do the same? We should put the past behind us and start fresh—let's make it a clean slate. We're all equal now. In fact, people of color get favored over the rest of us. Does the past really affect us all that much? Even if we wanted to, fixing the past is impossible, so why waste our time trying? Our ancestors won, and yours lost. That's just the way*

*it is. Get over it! Move on! Stop whining and blaming others for your problems! Pull yourself up by your bootstraps! Blend in! Get with the program! In any case, how do we know you're not exaggerating? Our historians don't tell us about these terrible events. Stories of atrocities aren't in our written records. When Columbus landed, there probably weren't more than one or two million Indians here anyway. I can't help it if their immune systems couldn't handle European diseases. Whatever happened, it's no one's fault; it's just progress. If it hadn't been us, it would have been someone else. Let's focus on today's harms; we'd be lucky to put those right. You can't go forward by looking back. Face it: you're better off now than your ancestors were before we came. You've got TVs, computers, cars, music, refrigerators, cell phones—tons of stuff you didn't have. And look at TV sitcoms and all the news anchor people of color: there's no racism anymore. We like everyone. I do anyway. Some of my best friends . . .*

### **Question for Reflection**

What is one thing that you understood for the first time or understood in a deeper way today and what new questions has that brought up for you?

### **Participatory Response #1—Summarized Class Discussion for Lesson 2**

- Core idea that white people are the colonizers, over time we have perpetuated the idea that we are better, no matter who we are relating to. “We are better than Indigenous, slaves, guy down the road in the trailer.” The idea that they don't do enough to get what they need, so why should we feel sorry for them?
- [We here people say,] “Why do we need to worry about that it was our ancestors or hundreds of years ago?” No responsibility to reparations. We want to put it all in the past.

- Talking about the deaths of Indigenous, Brown, Black, Trans women. The devaluation of brown bodies has gone on through the ages. So many, especially white people, want everyone to get over it.
- On campuses right now, believing a false history. Renaming of Tillman Hall at Clemson University
- Racist things happening on Cherokee land.
- How textbooks explained things. Parents had to sit kids down and tell them the truth. Why what really happened is not in our books. Dumbed down education system. We don't know what really happened and can't see through the lies.
- Our education system, especially secondary education has become corporatized. We cling to certain things in our own history. We tell each other about our own [white] ancestors' "oppression" [as Southerners and Mountain people] and we legitimize what has been done.
- Racism is maintained by pitting the poor against the marginalized, not allowing the conversation to go forward.
- Making property out of land that belongs to all, and making property out of people.
- The two pipeline issues. [Dakota Access Pipeline, & pipeline that ruptured creating a temporary gas shortage in Asheville that week]
- There is such a continuing connection of brown bodies as savage, violent, and criminalized. Framing the people as inhumane to form them as enemies. They sensationalize the facts of brown men to form them as more scary.



- Narrative of Arab peoples as exceedingly violent and savage with no moral core. These are consistencies from history that still continue today.
- The need of colonizers to justify this colonialism. [They were] of God, we were given the land, manifest destiny
- Settler redlining, racist housing policies, these idea continues to snowball. Everyone who arrived here was not equal when they put their feet on the ground, not even speaking of the Indigenous. Criminals, indentured servants, tradesmen coming from a class society. Those elements still remained. For those it was easier to “blend in” with the more well off because they were the right color. It was easy to “other” the black and brown bodies.
- This reminds me of the white poor now, “othering” those of other colors.
- Colonization—a lot of this same rhetoric gets used in reverse in regards to Islamophobia. [People] use the same language to make it look like Islam is colonizing. The real and perceived power dynamics are of concern. It doesn’t matter where you are in the structure you can still perceive fear.
- Appropriation—the catholic church took all the shaman practices and put it in their practices.
- Binary gender identities, criminalize those who do not conform. “make America great again” the less conscious we are of what is going on, we can be manipulated in any direction.
- Capitalism—lack of stewardship, corporate control.

**Participatory Response #2—E-mail Correspondence for Lesson 2**

**Contributor #1.** Thanks for all the links. I had a few I wanted to share back with you as resources, should you need any more—and I'm sure you're drowning in resources already. But just in case any of it is useful!

Re: folks who want to derail discussions by saying that racism is hundreds of years in the past... The little girl in this very famous picture just turned 62 years old. 62 is not ancient! People who experienced the desegregation of public schools are still alive and speaking today  
<http://www.afropunk.com/photo/happy-61th-birthday-ruby-bridges?context=latest>

In the event that a discussion about the word "Caucasian" to indicate whiteness should come up, here's a great resource: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/sunday-review/has-caucasian-lost-its-meaning.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/sunday-review/has-caucasian-lost-its-meaning.html?_r=0)

Re: [Participant's] comments about white men (police officers) imagining that black men are enormous, I wanted to forward a line from the poet Claudia Rankine "Because white men can't police their imagination black men are dying." Here's a great interview citing that line: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/27/claudia-rankine-poet-citizen-american-lyric-feature> This is a great 101 type resource for folks new to concepts and words like "white privilege." I haven't even finished watching all the videos linked in here, but if you wanted to forward it to any sort of platform, I found it very user friendly and easy to reckon with: [http://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/under-our-skin/#person\\_of\\_color](http://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/under-our-skin/#person_of_color)

**Facilitator's response.** Thank you so much for all of these resources. I have seen a few of these and some are new. But they are TOTALLY relevant to this topic and so right on. For more of these types of topics in an easy-to-watch video to share with friends, I really like

Chelsey Ramsey on MTV/Youtube. She explains things so clearly and I have found that her way of communication is very non-threatening to those who are new to anti-racism/anti-colonialism.

**Contributor #2.** Here are my thoughts on the question. I've had some trouble coming up with an answer, because a lot of what we got last week felt a little out of context. Like we were getting parts of an argument, but missing some of the lead up or terminology. I think ultimately though, I feel like I'm starting to get a better understanding of what class pressures made colonization so desirable to the European powers. One of the areas I wasn't clear on from last week, is the argument that some of the speakers seemed to be making about the relationship between property and colonization. There were hints from the speakers we saw, but I didn't hear or understand the fleshed out argument.

**Facilitator's response.** Thanks so much for your input and thoughtful comments. I really appreciate having you part of this class. Regarding your comment of it seeming like some things were out of context, I must apologize; I sometimes fear that I am so close to this topic that sometimes I fail to give proper background to some of the concepts and end up making people feel like they are coming into a conversation that is already happening, without knowing all the details.

Regarding private property and colonization... the argument is that, in order to systematically take possession of the Americas AND justify it legally and Biblically, the colonizers had to demonize collective land stewardship and section off the land as individualized private property, government property, and public lands (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Estes, 2013). Instead of trying to learn about the complex systems of sharing, rotational land practices, and acknowledgment of stationary and migratory clan hunting patterns, most colonizers sought to

make out Indigenous peoples as savages who had no understanding of sustainable forestry, agriculture, or hunting practices. [Facilitator's note: It was not my intention to imply that all settlers believed Indigenous peoples had no understanding of those things, but that it was the overarching thrust of settler colonialism to delegitimize Indigenous concepts of land stewardship. History is not clear and common sense says that these prejudices did not necessarily indicate an evil inherent in all, or even most, settlers.] This superiority continues today in national parks [in instances where forestry and farming practices ignore Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Elders and local Indigenous Knowledge keepers, though inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge has begun to be more commonplace] (Burr, 2003; Poirier & Ostergren, 2002).

Thus when land was made into a commodity where governments and individuals could “own” the land, land was then seen primarily for its utility and monetary resources and not for its sacredness or ties to millennia of relationship with human beings. Tied into all this is the turning of human beings into commodities, namely Black and Indigenous peoples. Then, in order to create a prosperous society, the capitalistic bourgeoisie of the “New World”, namely the landless from Europe, saw land and people with a price tag and plugged in those numbers to their advantage. This is so much more complex, but these were just some of my thoughts on this argument. Here a few resources I found on the subject:

<https://landsoverseas.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/wp-allangreer.pdf>

<http://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/settler-colonialism/>

**Contributor #3.** During this first week, my group was given the term Indigenism to discuss. I believe that the term is at the heart of the complexity and difficulty of this issue. I found myself wondering what it would mean to prioritize the rights and struggles of Indigenous

peoples. What does that look like? A part of me recoils when I think about it. I'm certain that part is responding out of fear.

**Facilitator's response.** I have also had those same recoiling fears. I have heard many discussions around this from Indigenous perspectives and also from minority and feminist perspectives when talking about the question, "What if someone else was in charge?" And the responses are all similar to: "Don't think that we will treat you as badly as you have treated us." Indigenous worldviews value diversity of thought and democracy. I don't think we have much to fear if we give Indigenous people a seat at the table of power.

**Contributor #3.** But I think my response actually goes beyond the fear of the colonizer because what I'm most frightened of is that we are going to destroy the planet with greed and a nearly complete unwillingness to address serious environmental concerns.

**Facilitator's response.** I think, and [another participant] from our class has echoed this, that some people will need different reasons for supporting decolonization. We need to contextualize what's at stake for each type of person. If you are a small farmer, it will be pretty easy to make the connection between the destructive effects of neighboring GMO crops on your local crops. If you are a small business owner, it will make sense to you, that the neocolonial, neoliberal, and wasteful practice of importing cheap disposable goods that destroy manufacturing economies is not good for you. Not everyone is going to intrinsically feel connected to the environment in a spiritual way like we do, we have to communicate to them in a way that touches their felt need.

**Contributor #3.** I also found myself wondering this week about how someone from a Christian tradition should respond to this issue. I believe that I could find a home in Cherokee religious traditions, but know that I don't need to be co-opting that, too.

**Facilitator's response.** Such good thoughts here. I find in every world religion, there exists a faction (albeit small) of faithful who follow progressive, mystic beliefs and practices. There have even been more advanced Indigenous civilizations that have practiced things such as slavery and unsustainable land practices. That being said, relationship changes everything. Westerners tend to have the desire to “know about” something and “acquire the information as if it were a tradable commodity. Many Indigenous cosmologies focus on “knowing your relations,” getting to know someone as a person until they become your family. The knowledge you gain is inextricably linked to the person you learn it from. So, it is completely appropriate to develop a relationship with a Cherokee individual who practices their traditions, and they can choose to invite you to participate. After participating with them, and being in relationship with them, your spirituality is affected and it SHOULD be.

**Contributor #3.** I realize that Christianity has also become an element in Cherokee tradition, but I wonder what Christianity has to say to the problem given that it was so very influential in helping to create it.

**Facilitator's response.** Again, our voices are few, but we need to continue shouting. I think Land of the Sky is already a great example of speaking truth to historical evil.

**Contributor #3.** I think for me it's difficult to even know where to begin in an ethical and sustainable way. I get that we have to take little steps, but they seem so insignificant at a moment when large acts of faith and courage are called for.

**Facilitator's response.** Yes, I can have moments of paralyzation, not knowing how to start. I can also have times of “Am I making any difference?” and feeling like giving up. I hope that this class at church was able to communicate the interconnectedness of it all. Think environmental, think anti-racist, think anti-capitalist, think shared land, think sacredness of land, think acceptance of all people... it's call connected. Basically, everything we are already doing, but for me it helps to know the multifaceted tentacles of this sickness called settler colonialism. Otherwise, it feels like we are just punching at air. Thanks again.

## Reflection on Lesson 2

This was the first lesson that we had active discussion and it was very exciting to hear all of the participants' opinions and thoughts as they delved into this emotionally charged topic. This lesson was particularly relevant to the participants as our congregation had just finished a workshop on racial justice, talking about the history of redlining, discrimination of Black folks from housing through the G.I. bill (Hall 2005), and other historical acts that contribute to contemporary systemic racism. That conversation helped connect one aspect of the colonial triad, that of chattel slavery and its effects, with the other two aspects: settlers who never leave and the erasure of Indigenous peoples. This connection can be seen in the participants' comments.

Also important to note are the myriad contemporary issues that were headlining in the news and social media throughout this curriculum project: Dakota Access Pipeline and Standing Rock (Hopper, 2016); Black Lives Matter protests (Williams & Wines, 2016); the 2016 election (Kristof, 2016); talk of building "The Wall" and immigration reform (Preston, Rappeport, & Richtel, 2016); and Syrian refugees (Hauser, 2016). Most notably, however, is the amazing awakening happening due to the increased awareness of Indigenous rights and historical abuses shown through the Water Protectors at Standing Rock. Each of the class times could have been only filled with news reports and videos of that event and it would have still been worthwhile. Surprisingly, we did not spend much class time discussion about the Pipeline, but focused on the historical acts that led to such an occurrence. In social media outside of class, however, I had a lot of interaction with other participants about Standing Rock.

The excitement surrounding Lesson 2, which could be seen in the comments and feedback throughout the project, seemed to carry on in each of the other lessons. It was true of



every class time we had, but on this day especially it seemed like we could have kept the discussion going on for hours.



### Lesson 3 “Interconnectivity of Social Justice and (De)Colonization”

#### Lesson Aim

Allow participants to come to their own realizations about the many connections between social justice efforts and the project of decolonization.

#### Time/Duration: 1-2 hrs

#### Lesson Materials

##### Slides for Introduction:

- [http://67.media.tumblr.com/3353bda1fc8973a816f4b78b0f0f56df/tumblr\\_nugqe9dl3z1uxpkfao1\\_1280.jpg](http://67.media.tumblr.com/3353bda1fc8973a816f4b78b0f0f56df/tumblr_nugqe9dl3z1uxpkfao1_1280.jpg) (Olstein, 2015)
- <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/AspenOverview0172.JPG> (Wikipedia Commons, 2005)

##### Videos:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD1Pk\\_9hcsG](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD1Pk_9hcsG) (Sewer, 2015) at TED St. Thomas
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ707s2Xi7Q> (Khan, 2016) Penguins

**Reading:** “Desire to belong: Reflections as a settler searching for sense of place” from *Unsettling Ourselves* [https://unsettlingminnesota.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/um\\_sourcebook\\_jan10\\_revision.pdf](https://unsettlingminnesota.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/um_sourcebook_jan10_revision.pdf)

#### Lesson Background

Presenting perhaps the central idea in this curriculum, Lesson 3 discusses the connectedness of the many societal ills of the settler colonial state—such as racial disparities, economic inequalities, and gender discrimination—and links them to the Colonial Triad. This lesson also begins to explore ways in which activists in many different aspects of social justice

can cooperate by entering into decolonization efforts together. This lesson came about as a result of the author's own realization of the connections among poverty and racial injustice, and how settler colonialism was at the root of many contemporary problems seen today.

## **Definitions**

**Interconnectivity:** the holistic interconnectedness of systems/ideas, related to one another through a common root system. In the case of decolonization, the common root system is settler colonialism and the interconnected organisms are oppressive systems that promote settler, white, hereto-patriarchal, and extractive-capitalist ideologies over all others [Definition by original facilitator].

## **Lesson Activities**

### **Lesson preparation.**

- Have a projector/multimedia player and audio/speakers ready.
- Cue up the two image slides and the two YouTube videos.
- Invite one volunteer with a laptop to take notes during group participation in order to record what is said.
- Invite one person to read the passage from *Unsettling Ourselves*

**Introduction.** Facilitator read the following script. *What we are doing here, is taking our ever-evolving sense of justice and applying it to history, challenging what we learned in the history books and attempting to right historical (old and newer) wrongs, whose effects are still being seen today. What we are seeing in today's world, are symptoms of a bigger problem that is finally reaching its tipping point:*

- *Rampant killing of Black people*

- *Environmental Collapse*
- *Indigenous Land (what little is left) being taken*
- *Collapse of the Capitalist economy (no jobs, high crime, extreme world poverty, huge debt, privatization of medical, education, and prisons)*

Show the two slides of Pando tree.

*The Trembling Giant, or Pando, is an enormous grove of quaking aspens that take the ‘forest as a single organism’ metaphor and literalizes it: the grove really is a single organism. Each of the approximately 47,000 or so trees in the grove is genetically identical and all the trees share a single root system . . . The individual trees aren’t individuals, but stems of a massive single clone, and this clone is truly massive.*

*Spanning 107 acres and weighing 6,615 tons, Pando was once thought to be the world’s largest organism (now usurped by thousand-acre fungal mats in Oregon), and is almost certainly the most massive. In terms of other superlatives, the more optimistic estimates of Pando’s age have it as over one million years old, which would easily make it one of the world’s oldest living organisms. (Atlas Obscura, 2013)*

*It can be easy to feel overwhelmed when one is not able to see the big picture. As one explores deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole of oppressive structures, the root structures of how they are all connected come into view. The soil of greed, selfishness, hate, and superiority feed the interconnected roots of these trees which could be labeled racism, extractive capitalism, homophobia, Islamaphobia, etc. You can cut one tree down, but until you dig up the entire root system, the organism still survives. Though it may be several millennia more before we figure out*

*what to do about hate, greed, and selfishness, one of the deepest and largest root systems we can attack is that of settler colonialism. It feeds all the roots.*

**Play video clips (Around 16 minutes).**

**Activity #1.** Have participants break up into small groups and spend time asking each other the following question: “What connections between decolonization and racial/social justice do you think exist?”. Use discretion about how much time is to be spent on this activity.

Facilitator can join several groups temporarily to listen in and participate.

**Activity #2.** Have a group discussion about people’s answers and reflections about the previous question. Be sure to have the volunteer taking notes to be furiously typing at this point.

**Activity #3.** Have volunteer read excerpt from *Unsettling Minnesota* (2009) in Appendix B.

**Questions for Reflection**

Have participants ponder these questions and respond throughout the week via e-mail or other avenues.

- Have you ever felt a desire to feel connected to the land, find your “place,” or feel forced to go against your conscience in how you live your life (house, food, land, job)?
- Where do you think these desires/feelings come from? [See literature review of this project for more resources on place attachment and land education]

**Final Thought**

Read at the end of class: *“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together ”*  
*Lille Watson, Aboriginal Activist from Australia.*

### Participatory Response #1—Summarized Class Discussion for Lesson 3

- Where do you start? Europe, before that tribes fighting against each other for resources, before that crossing the Bering Strait to take over land. Before that homo sapiens against neanderthals. Human nature. [Is it just human nature to conquer one another?]
- Military need in the [colonial overseas] territories has dried up. Do they pull out and leave them to starve?
- Cain and Abel. Agriculture vs. shepherding. Brought about first wars of territory. Metaphor of things that happened in need of land.
- The people here [on Turtle Island] had a way of relating to land, Mississippi mound cultures started depleting too many natural resources that would collapse.
- Prosperity society—we had to racialize people, used the Bible as a weapon to justify that. Environmental degradation.
- Metaphor of the penguins—the view of a cycle is so much more of the way the Native Americans lived. The fighting is more of an aberration of how they lived originally. How do we do this? There is something that yearns for cooperation. The system that we have in place, some say the whole system has to fall before we can change, but we have no view of anarchy in our culture, it could be total destruction.
- There are ways to move towards decolonization and cooperation that do not involve collapse. Doing it piece by piece. White people can be afraid that they will then be treated the way they have been treating the oppressed.

- Everyone in the spiral is treated equally, they are moving the resources around. There is no worry because everyone is truly equal and can move around and distribute the resources.
- Perception—if you believe that people are equal.
- Key metaphor—there is care and compassion involved in the spiral. The system requires this care and compassion, otherwise those in the center will never move. It cannot be done by setting rules, it has to be done by compassion. I can not survive without a mutual care. Develop a system of survival and caring.
- We all have various passions as activists that can vary. In our church we can see how we can work together with those passions as they are all linked. Immigration justice with decolonization justice. They are coming from different paradigms.
- We are not very different when we go out to the general population. We have a resistance to being told we are all alike. Everyone is independent. It is hard for people to see what they have in common.
- The concept of the penguin fails in the present context in that we do not have the trust and belief that we are all working together, and that we are seeking to undermine the others. How does the system reclaim the exploiters back into the whole? There is no cost benefit to supporting everyone else. In our American culture, where indulgence is a prized framework, can be out for self.



### **Participatory Response #2—E-mail Correspondence for Lesson 3**

**Contributor #1.** I'm going to try my best to keep this short, but so many thoughts came up during the workshop that there wasn't space to talk about in person. My talking partner and I discussed the ways that gentrification is a ripple effect of colonization . . .

**Facilitator's response.** This is so true! It's almost like yesterday's Biblical and legal rationalizations like Manifest Destiny and Terra Nullius, are today's "I can't be held responsible for what my grandparents did" argument, or "we are revitalizing this community" like so many Evangelical Christians are doing right now in Detroit

**Contributor #1.** . . . how colonization was the drop in the bucket (or the original root structure) and how the ripple effects (or tree branches) are still being felt today in pernicious ways like the lack of affordable housing in Asheville.

**Facilitator's response.** I'm so glad you were both localizing and contextualizing this to Asheville. People in positions of power sent other people to go exploit the land or the people in another place, and in the end nobody wins. So many of us are left with a sense of displacement even if we are in positions of privilege. I think it is really hard to wake people up to the fact that this is not THEIR land, even though they may wander around looking for their place their whole lives. For those of us who have woken up, it's almost like the only way we will ever experience a just "emplacement" is through working towards decolonization. I'm not sure what that will look like yet, but I do know that looking toward Indigenous leaders and People of Color community leaders is a way towards that future.

**Contributor #1.** Second and very importantly, in reference to the penguins: I have seen arguments around the BLM [Black Lives Matter] movement that the dismantling of white

supremacy IS self-serving for white people, and DOES benefit white people and needs to be framed that way to forward the movement—not because it's manipulative but because it's true. I heard the participant's words about how care and compassion are integral to the movement and I certainly wouldn't ever disparage care and compassion. However, I don't think that argument or appealing to care and compassion is necessary at all, and can be a little distracting for people who genuinely DON'T care or are actively RESISTANT to caring.

**Facilitator's response.** This is a good point. You can't make someone care, but you can appeal to how dismantling white supremacy is good for their pocketbooks, tax allocation, property value, crime rate, educated society, economy, etc..

**Contributor #1.** A part of me was wondering if, with the penguins, it is healthy for them to circulate: get warm, get cool, get warm, get cool, and how staying in the middle might actually not be beneficial for the warm ones: where hoarding that "wealth" might actually overheat a penguin, you know what I'm saying? I haven't done any kind of penguin research, but I think it could offer a new perspective if we agree that hoarding wealth does not benefit the wealthy or powerful, AND does not benefit the folks at the bottom: equal distribution is beneficial for us all. (I don't want to get sidetracked with a capitalist rant, but in the name of intersectionality and class struggle I would point to research showing that no further happiness is available to a person once you hit 70K a year, and arguments for a universal basic income are completely brilliant. But that's for another day.)

**Facilitator's response.** Yes, this is perfect. I think it must be proven that there is psychological damage done when one has so much and has to fight so much to keep it or to keep making more. We know this from seeing the children of the rich and the things they deal with.

The dismantling, or at least COMPLETE reformation of capitalism is a requirement for decolonization. I would also add that governments and state-systems may also need to be rethought. Our current large-scale societies with our big-box stores and big government will not be sustainable in the coming years. Now I'm getting side tracked. ;-)

**Contributor #1.** I wondered if assimilation will come up specifically; a theme of conversations around me lately has been the anti-black racism that older brown folks who immigrated here adopt as a means of fitting in with the dominant paradigm: I'm referring anecdotally to my Syrian grandfather who immigrated here at four years old, served in the American military and was a noisy anti-black racist; he married a white woman (my grandmother) who was French and German and proceeded to raise five light-skinned kids who grew up to be anti-black racists also. I recognized the same thing in an ex-partner's Colombian grandfather and noticed the way that white supremacy pits everyone against each other; another drop in the bucket that had far-reaching ripples.

**Facilitator's response:** Assimilation definitely does play a huge role in decolonization. I think the hourglass metaphor for the hierarchy of proximity to whiteness can be useful here. The closer you are the "white" (Jewish, Syrian, European-Colombian) the easier it is to align yourself (because of power dynamics) and be accepted by the dominant white structure.

**Contributor #1.** There are some fantastic articles out there about the Korean response to the LA riots that bring the same thing in to focus.

**Facilitator's response.** Great example.

**Contributor #1.** And there's also been a brilliant crowdsourced letter that a bunch of East Asian folks (mostly college students) put together to communicate the importance of BLM

to their parents and families, in whom they often witnessed anti-black racism; the letter is here if you haven't seen it: <https://lettersforblacklives.com/dear-mom-dad-uncle-auntie-black-lives-matter-to-us-too-7ca577d59f4c#.kaxt23aej>

As a resource for interested people in the group, this tumblr has literally thousands of excellent resources linked within and is great for perusal: <http://thisiswhiteprivilege.tumblr.com/>

**Facilitator's response.** That is so good. So powerful. We need to make this resource available to the racial justice team. It's so much to hold...we can never rest in working towards justice.

**Contributor #1.** I have a million more thoughts I wrote down with intent to share but this is already plenty long so I'll cut it off here. Thanks for getting that PDF to me already! I'll see you next week!

**Facilitator's response.** Again, I REALLY appreciate all of your responses. Keep them coming if you have more.

**Contributor #2.** This is another set of tough questions for me, in part because I haven't really felt that desire to feel connected to something and somewhere geographically. I do like to have my "place", but I tend to end up feeling fairly rooted to whatever place I spend more than a few months in, as long as I am able to establish a set of routines and habits. I've never felt the kind of wanderlust or lack of belonging that the individual from Minnesota described. And when I do feel rooted or feel like I belong, it has more to do with feeling comfortable with the practical matters of living in a place (I know how to get around, I have my grocery shopping routine down, I have a fairly regular schedule etc.) and less to do with any sort of spiritual connection to the land.

As for the second part of the question, I think like all of us, I have felt that tension in how living in the world forces me to make moral compromises. When I was a consultant, I would sometimes feel uncomfortable about working for certain large corporate clients, knowing the kinds of practices they were involved in. But when I dwell on it, I always feel like there's nothing clear and actionable I can do. And part of my personality is that I tend to suppress or ignore emotions (something which I've always been a little too good at), which don't lead to clear actionable plans, so I ultimately don't spend too much time with those feelings. I don't know that that's a particularly good choice, but I'm also not too comfortable with the alternative either, which is to more deeply feel the guilt, but not actually be able to do anything about it.

**Facilitator's response.** I understand it can be a tough question as we all have different life experiences, personalities, etc.. I did not start to even think about my desire to be connected to a place until a few years ago. What came before that was a desire to have a community, a real community. I have been so #blessed (hahaha), but seriously grateful for finding Land of the Sky and even my own neighborhood in Sand Hill. I feel like I finally have that community. As far as being connected to the land, I am convinced that something necessary for me to pursue that desire, is to connect with the history of this land [by asking] “what happened here hundreds and even thousands of years ago?” I also feel like being connected to work against the anti-black and Cherokee land theft history of this place is also part of what connects me to this place.

I understand about suppressing and ignoring emotions. It can be overwhelming to be confronted with a new understanding of injustice, or come across a situation like working for certain large corporate clients, that makes you wonder if anything of substance can really be done about these things, without just quitting our jobs and living like protesting hippies. Even

then, it would be impossible to completely disconnect yourself completely from privilege and injustice in every aspect of your life.

I think clear actionable choices can be made towards decolonization, towards a more just future. These are everyday decisions of what products we buy, whose opinion on land policy we listen to and vote for, divesting from corporations in your IRA or investments, financially supporting Indigenous rights groups, opening up your land for community farming, voting for progressive candidates, finding out what Indigenous leaders care about and then support them in that, be part of a community (LOS) that is actively fighting racism, colonization, and injustice everywhere, and any other small decision that contributes to large change. This fight against colonization has been going on for hundreds of years. I see my efforts as continuing the fight for a better future for the next generation.

### **Reflection on Lesson 3**

This was one of my favorite lessons and one that I was most passionate about. In fact, the idea of interconnectivity of settler colonialism and social justice is what inspired me to start this curriculum in the church. Several months before this project, my wife and I had discussed that a great deal of people in the church were engaged in multiple justice issues, but that the topic of Indigenous land rights and decolonization was not something we had heard mentioned very often. That was when my wife suggested I contact the co-pastors of our church to co-create and present this curriculum.

The participants' response to Lesson 3 was varied and lively. My notetaker was furiously trying to keep up with everyone's thoughts and reflections. The participants really seemed to connect with the interconnectivity of all of these concepts and applied this new idea to their own work in social justice. One common settler response to decolonization that I identified during the discussion time was that of "Isn't it just human nature?" or "Weren't the Indigenous people just fighting and conquering each other long before we came and conquered them?" I answered yes, greed and fighting over land resources seem to be a human tendency. This seems to have been true since the dawn of the Neolithic Revolution, between and among hunters and gatherers and agriculturalists. However, though Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island have had smaller disputes over land, with the exception of a few Indigenous empires, the recognition of territorial stewardship had been relatively stable for thousands of years. In contrast, the invasion of European settler colonialism drastically changed humans' relationship to the Land within the scope of a few hundred years.

However, we are not assuming life was perfect pre-European contact, nor should we naively wish to go back to an idealized time that did not necessarily exist. Rather, as our global collective sense of justice has evolved over the millennia, we have a moral obligation to examine the historical injustices of the past—both pre- and post-contact. This moral obligation compels us to change our present society to one that is democratic by consensus, honors Elders' knowledge of the Land, and considers all non-human entities in its policies.

Overall, I felt that this lesson truly sparked a conversation about how decolonization is connected to making a more fair society. It also sparked weeks of e-mail and personal conversations between myself and the participants.



## **Lesson 4 “Interconnectivity of Environmental Justice and (De)Colonization”**

### **Lesson Aim**

Allow participants to come to their own realizations about the many connections between environmental justice efforts and the project of decolonization.

**Time/Duration: 1-2 hrs**

### **Lesson Materials**

#### **Videos:**

- <https://youtu.be/jLOfXsFlb18?t=9m45s> Jeannette Armstrong (2011) TEDx
- <https://youtu.be/KI89FHqvr0?t=8m40s> Ariel Deranger (2015) Bioneers

### **Lesson Background**

Because the forms of interconnectedness among social, racial, economic, LGBTQ+, and environmental justice issues with the project of decolonization are so vast and varied, the subjects are broken up into two lessons: Lesson 3 discussed social justice and Lesson 4 discussed environmental and Land justice. However, because of the similarity of the two lessons, some questions about connection to Land and place attachment were carried on into this lesson. The literature review of this paper has many helpful resources for land education and place attachment. This lesson purposefully has less content to allow for more time for discussion and participants’ input for the co-creation of this curriculum.

### **Lesson Activities**

#### **Lesson preparation.**

- Have a projector/multimedia player and audio/speakers ready.
- Cue up the two YouTube videos.

- Invite one volunteer with a laptop to take notes during group participation in order to record what is said.

**Introduction.** Read the following script. *Last week we discussed the many different connections among social justice issues and the project of decolonization. This week, we will continue to discuss our connection to Land as well as how environmental justice efforts have ironically also been subject to colonization and how we can center Indigenous leaders in these areas.*

**Play video clips.**

**Activity #1.** Address the group sitting in a circle, if it is no more than 20 people (if so, break it into several large groups) and provide them the following to questions to think about and respond out loud in turn. Take time in meaningful discussion in the Talking Circle.

- The questions from the previous week revisited:
  - Have you ever felt a desire to feel connected to the land, find your “place,” or feel forced to go against your conscience in how you live your life (house, food, land, job)?
  - Where do you think these desires/feeling come from?
- What is one way that you are involved in environmental justice in your community, and how could this work towards decolonization of Land?
- What did you think about the videos?

**Questions for Reflection for next week.**

- What is one step you can take towards decolonization in your job/school this week?

- What is one step you can take towards decolonization in your job/school this year (suggestions for policy change, starting a conversation, be creative)
- What are some ways that we could work towards including a decolonization perspective in our faith community's existing efforts in racial, environmental, economic, and LGBTQ+ justice?
- Dream big! What would you like to see be created in relation to Indigenous-led decolonization, societal structure change, land reparations, or more here at your church or in your city.

#### **Participatory Response #1—Summarized Class Discussion for Lesson 4**

- I have been thinking about my privilege in where I live, with its rules and regulations. I have three acres myself. We each have our own single family lots. I have so much space to be able to help those in need of housing. I am unable to share my land or have chickens. I want to learn how we can overcome those rules. Break down the gate and share my land with everyone.
- Do companies like Shell have a group that helps them monitor their actions in regards to taking land? Do they self-monitor? There are those that help soften the blow ahead of time. They have the prior consent done in a non-cultural way, but they have the signature they need. They serve their best interests. The nature of corporations.
- In Alaska, the Elders for generations have been fighting projects. The corporation is fine with waiting until a generation passes and doesn't care.

- The idea is to break down a community, isolate, break down of cultural identity and practices, people stop caring.
- Looking at the town I grew up in, the Tlingit kids started to come to our school. There are slur words against Natives. The culture is being decimated through drugs and alcohol. The language is [being] lost.
- [Historic European-American] minister saying we have a covenant with this land, kill and destroy because we are entitled to this land from God. Systematic taking of children from houses, received abuse, and then those kids pass on what they have been exposed to for the generations.
- The Indigenous movements are on the cutting edge of the environmental movement. How can we ally with that?
- The directors still seem to be white of these environmental movements. We still think in a colonial manner that we have the answers. Example of burning the forest so that pine trees can reseed. Centering Indigenous people in environmental justice leadership.
- I would like to learn about the Cherokee and their connections to the environmental movement.
- It is such a huge problem it is like a blade of grass coming through concrete. It can feel hopeless. Find the willingness to be involved in something that seems impossible to overcome.
- We are not starting this fight, it has been going on for centuries and you can make your personal imprint. Indigenous think of seven generations before and after with every action they do. They go through their life like this. Think critically of every action you

make. Cities are “nature.” Start seeing things for what they are and make different decisions. Little “important” decisions.

- Local connections to environmental groups here in Asheville: an environmental workshop on advocacy.
- There are a couple people in the church that work through environmental justice.
- Something called me back to the area, I was out as soon as I turned 18 years old. I feel like it was nature, the seasons. I needed to feel rooted to something in order to be engaged in these justice issues.
- I started feeling the need for the earth when I got very sick. Part of my healing was doing gardening. Something about getting into the dirt. Does it have to do with growing old and going back to the dirt? Then we moved here. When I went to start to do the garden I went to plants that I always did in the north. They didn't survive. IF you plant native plants, they will live. Identifying with the earth.
- It is right and human to want to feel connected to a place. We are reconciling the fact that your ancestors came for a variety of reasons. We are here in this time desiring connected to a place, but that is in conflict with Indigenous rights and land theft.

#### **Participatory Response #2—E-mail Correspondence for Lesson 4**

**Contributor #1.** Thanks for your responses. It's inspiring to be around hopeful people :)

I'm trying to find the essay I was referring to about how white supremacy needs to be dismantled as much for white people as for everyone else and I can't seem to find it! I'll keep digging though. It was a really good piece with a brand new perspective worth digging in to.

Unfortunately the search terms I'm coming up with are hard to differentiate from every other

article about dismantling white supremacy. I think being able to reframe race justice—or to have a number of different ways to present racial justice is integral to getting the message out there.

**Facilitator's response.** This is important because each white person is on a different point in their journey towards awakening to anti-racism and many may not even be on that journey, in fact they may be on a journey furthering their fear, ignorance, and racism.

**Contributor #1.** If every white person rallying for justice tries to appeal from a place of compassion and care, many folks on the other side of the fence will write this off as, say, "bleeding heart liberalism," and won't hear anything else. It is hard to get the message through to the folks who look down on care and compassion, and I like working with other ways to get through to them.

**Facilitator's response.** I have heard the science that most every person has the innate need to cling to the belief that they are a good person, that they make their decisions for the good of people. They truly believe that they are working towards the good of all people, except bad people. In their minds, "bad people" deserve what they've got coming to them. Science Mike, a progressive white Christian, anti-racist podcaster, has talked about this and said that when speaking to people on the other side of the fence, we should start every conversation around race stroking their conscience by saying, "I know you are a good person..." or "I can see you really care about people..." and then talk in "I" statements like "I have had this personal experience...". Now, this may only work with people you already have a relationship with, who genuinely care about your opinion, and not necessarily for the general internet public.

**Contributor #1.** Genuinely though, the piece made a good case—it wasn't trying to be "sneaky;" it was a legitimate explanation of the ways white supremacy stifles white people too. Much the way that the patriarchy stifles men and boys—speaking of intersectionality ;)

**Facilitator's response.** Very good point. I hope you can find this article.

**Contributor #1.** Yesterday you were talking about an interactive (I think?) map of Manhattan where one could scroll around and look at it the way it used to be or maybe should be today. Could you send that out?

**Facilitator's response.** Here is one, though it's not the one I had seen earlier. There is another one that was like interactive pictures you could slide back and forth but I can't find it. [https://www.ted.com/talks/eric\\_sanderson\\_pictures\\_new\\_york\\_before\\_the\\_city?language=en#](https://www.ted.com/talks/eric_sanderson_pictures_new_york_before_the_city?language=en#) and <https://welikia.org/explore/mannahatta-map/>

**Contributor #1.** Someone was referring to going back to the land the other day, and it made me think of this picture: [http://rlv.zcache.com/a\\_short\\_history\\_of\\_medicine\\_mousepad-r2a3468402a184702a18f779968afa24c\\_x74vi\\_8byvr\\_324.jpg](http://rlv.zcache.com/a_short_history_of_medicine_mousepad-r2a3468402a184702a18f779968afa24c_x74vi_8byvr_324.jpg) It's interesting to look at the ways that all these grand ideas of capitalism and scientific advances have failed us and how we're slowly seeking ways to go back to the things that worked before colonization, hmm.

**Facilitator's response.** I have seen that before. I love it. It's true that we are going backwards to go forwards.

**Contributor #1.** I'm scrolling endlessly through a friend's Facebook feed looking for a really good article they posted about the white supremacy inherent in every government organization and image of "professionalism," that I want to share. I haven't found it yet, but I'm

going to send an e-mail and see if I can find it. It really provided another focus-shift for me when I first saw it and I'd like to share it.

**Facilitator's response.** Great, I'd like to see it. It is true, though, that the view of "professionalism" is really just a ranking of how much one can assimilate into rich white male cultural norms.

**Contributor #1.** There was another piece I wanted to share referencing last week's discussion (the 25th) about community, and I can't find this one either but perhaps you've seen it already: It was about communal grazing grounds. Researchers were convinced that communal grazing grounds wouldn't work because individual shepherds would want to gorge their own sheep and wouldn't leave enough behind for anyone else. Ultimately, the society made it work; no one overgrazed their own herd to the detriment of anyone else. It makes me wonder about the origins of greed, which seems to be inherent in colonization. Where is the root of that? Where did it come from, and how did we all end up so corrupted by its effects, to this day?

**Facilitator's response.** There is definitely that myth of "the tragedy of the commons" that we are all taught in our Economics 101 class. It's a capitalist lie that we all are forced to buy. But it doesn't initially sit well with so many people, and that's because it's not entirely true. However, when we hyper-focus on individualism in our Western ideology, if you take that to its ultimate extreme, the root of it is selfishness. But it doesn't have to be that way. We all have choices and even as individuals, we can choose to not be selfish. We do it all the time.

<http://www.socialistvoice.ca/?p=316>

<http://steadystate.org/the-fallacy-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybdvjvIH-1U>



**Contributor #1.** It also made me think about the Eastern cultures with communal language systems; less idolization of the individual "winning" above everyone else, and more supportive of "we" statements, or words and turns of phrase that recognize the interdependence of us all.

**Facilitator's response.** Yes, I wholeheartedly agree and we need to center these cultural ideologies and embrace them in acknowledging all of the ideologies in our diverse population. There are some good things to Western individualism, but the problem has been that this has been the exclusive and dominant paradigm that we have all been forced to accept in every aspect of our society. No longer!

**Contributor #1.** As always there's plenty more to discuss but I'm running out of steam!

**Facilitator's response.** Thank you for all your thoughts. You can be sure they will provide an amazing resource for whoever chooses to take this and use this in the future.

**Contributor #2.** As I said last week in class, when I think about these issues, a sense of homelessness washes over me. On the one hand, I have always felt very connected to these mountains. When I was younger, I used to walk them thinking about my Irish and Scottish ancestors, feeling connected to them through Appalachia. Both sides of my family were here since before the Revolutionary War, which means that they would have been implicated one way or the other in the Trail of Tears. I remember hearing a scholar talk years ago about that time in our history, and he pointed out that the Cherokee had a higher literacy rate than the Scots-Irish who were instrumental in removing them from this area. Now, why would that have surprised me? I think my ignorance on that point is what colonizer privilege looks like.

**Facilitator's response.** When you shared about this in class, it really impacted me. In fact, it may be one of the main discussion points on my report because it strikes at the heart of the complexity of what decolonization is. We are all bound up in this mess of settler colonialism. Our collective consciences are only recently awakening to the injustice of the past. Yet what are we to do with our positive feelings of patriotism, connectedness to our hometown, our heritage? Was it all a lie? The answer is no. We do not have to discard every good thing that we received from our families and the land we have been raised in. It's okay to love bluegrass music, it's okay to feel connected to these mountains. I do, and I have only been here 10 months! However, now that we have all become even more aware of the sacredness of Land and the historical injustices against the Cherokee people, we actually can do something about it. Cherokee people are still here, Elders still have things to say about the Land and its future. We can fund, post on social media, and be involved in many ways. Even if it takes a while to develop a meaningful friendship with a knowledgeable member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, you can educate others, educate yourself, and practice holistic social and environmental justice in everyday life. Here are a few FB pages I follow that keep up to date on things happening in Cherokee and Indigenous Peoples across the land:

<https://www.facebook.com/tsalaginews/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/MuseumoftheCherokeeIndian/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/WCUCherokeeLanguage/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/nativelivesmatter1/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/IndigenousLifeMovement/?fref=ts>

**Contributor #2.** I don't know what the ethical response to this issue is. Perhaps I should embrace the sense of homelessness on this continent, but that feels almost cult-like in its renunciation of this world. I want to embrace the earth, not feel disconnected from it. Still, perhaps there is room for a type of spiritual release of ideas of land ownership. Anyway, thank you for helping all of us explore these issues. I don't think there are going to be easy answers to these questions.

**Facilitator's response.** Yes the answers are definitely not easy. I think, just as our church holds, that we find our home in the mystery. Once we understand the complexities of how our comfort has hurt others, we can no longer be comfortable like before. But that doesn't mean that we cannot find a sense of home in solidarity and sharing. As a white ally with Indigenous and Latinx folks, I have found more fulfillment in the honor of friendship and working alongside them, than I ever had when I was singing "Amber waves of grain" and wearing my "I support my president George W. Bush" T-shirt when I was younger, hahaha. I hope this helps. But I definitely want to hear back from you in coming months about this feeling and where it has taken you. To be honest, I am still wrestling with these feelings of wanting to be connected to this land. I hold it as a desire, but am holding it loosely, constantly seeking the ways in which I can live justly in this land. Hopefully we can keep this conversation going, informed by contemporary Indigenous leaders, and the path forward towards living justly in this Land will be made clearer and clearer. Thank you so much for being part of this.

#### **Reflection on Lesson 4**

This lesson was very encouraging because most of the participants, the majority of whom had attended the previous three lessons, seemed to really start to understand how settler colonialism was connected to virtually every social and environmental ill in our current society. They personalized it by connecting it to their own story. There was a member of our church, who interestingly grew up in rural Southeast Alaska, connected colonization to her past during the discussion. We spoke about boarding schools, historical trauma, and land theft. We talked about multinational “resource” development projects that have stained the land and broken up Indigenous families because of greed.

Also interesting to the Christian context of this curriculum, was our discussion about how the church-mandated ideologies of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) were used to attempt to justify the project of settler colonialism. These ideologies can still be subtly seen today in white Christian attitudes. Also encouraging, were participants’ comments that had shifted over the course of the weeks from overwhelming paralysis [i.e. “How can we ever begin to tackle this problem?”] to the beginning glimmers of hope of small practical steps we can take towards material decolonization. Some of these steps had to do with talking about our land practices and if we could act against the notion of private property by sharing land that we have title to and growing food on it. We even discussed our Western-influenced false separation of nature and city, and discussed how we can begin to see even land where “civilization” exists to be nature, treating it as the sacred Land that it is.

I ended Lesson 4 with hope for livened discussion in the following week about practical steps we can actually take in our community toward decolonization.

## **Lesson 5 “Practical Settler Steps Toward Allied Decolonization”**

### **Lesson Aim**

To engage in serious and productive dialogue about how participants can be allies in the project of decolonization and make them aware of how they can work together to begin immediately. Ideally, the first steps towards real action for the particular faith community will begin to form during discussion.

**Time/Duration: 1-2 hrs**

### **Lesson Materials**

#### **Videos:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GRSpmrjohU> INM (2013)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGqhgRr66ng> Walia (2012)

### **Lesson Background**

In order to further address the project’s initial research interests, it was important to have a co-created curriculum from participants’ own experience and ideas that would work toward an Indigenous-led or Indigenous-centered future. This lesson seeks to go beyond the theoretical and make it practical, personal, and societal. Sustainable revolutions happen because of the grassroots efforts of educated and informed humans. This lesson attempts to provide space for the beginnings of that grassroots effort from one particular faith community.

### **Definitions**

Please see <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/allyship/> (Unsettling America, 2013) for definitions and guiding principles in how to be an effective ally with Indigenous peoples toward decolonization.

## Lesson Activities

### Lesson preparation.

- Have a projector/multimedia player and audio/speakers ready.
- Cue up the two YouTube videos.
- Invite one volunteer with a laptop to take notes during group participation in order to record what is said.

**Introduction.** Read the following script. *Decolonization is challenging and working against the status quo of extractive capitalism, trickle-down economics, white supremacy in benevolent non-profit and government organizations. It means including Indigenous direction and cultural influences on policy and organizational structure. It means fighting against the lack of input from Indigenous leaders, researchers, and wisdom keepers. Consider reading the Allyship and Solidarity Guidelines (Unsettling America, 2013) provided in the definitions section of this lesson.*

### Play video clips

**Activity #1.** Instruct participants to close their eyes for one minute and visualize their answers to each of the questions provided in the following four activities. Instruct them to then share their thoughts with a partner. Spend around three minutes for each partner to answer the question. Instruct participants to take notes of these ideas if necessary. Repeat this for each of the first four activities. First question: *“What is one step you can take towards decolonization in your job/school this week?”*

**Activity #2.** *What is one step you can take towards decolonization in your job/school this year? (suggestions for policy change, starting a conversation, be creative)*

**Activity #3.** *What are some ways that we could work towards including a decolonization perspective in our faith community's existing efforts in racial, environmental, economic, and LGBTQ+ justice?*

**Activity #4.** *Dream big! What would you like to see be created in relation to Indigenous-led decolonization, societal structure change, land reparations, or more here at your church or in your city?*

**Activity #5.** Take turns in the larger talking circle talking about the answers to each of the questions as a group.

### **Question for Reflection**

Invite participants to please take time during the next week and elaborate on these ideas and e-mail them back to the class facilitator.

### **Participatory Response #1—Summarized Class Discussion for Lesson 5**

- We must keep our communities from being destroyed. Thought of genocide; we must stop the genocide.
- The value of money over people's wellbeing. The governments continue to set up developments at the cost of lives.
- The Dakota pipeline—"it is okay as long as the Indigenous are downstream and not us."
- Challenging and working against the status quo of extractive capitalism. Capitalism that takes, uses, and throws away without thought of the consequences.
- Trickle-down economics, white supremacy, benevolent non-profit organizations that are still top down, not valuing Indigenous input; not seeking out Indigenous input and leaders.

- What is one step you can take towards decolonization in your life this week?
- Driving to a campground that is run by a Cherokee, and surrounded by Cherokee land.  
Developing genuine relationship, even if it feels scary.
- Hospitals are not as kind to members of marginalized communities. Sometimes minorities are not given treatment they deserve, I want to speak to that this week.
- Help an immigrant family . . . there was a need that no one else could fulfill. A large majority of Latinx people that come into the states undocumented are Indigenous. They are fleeing racial and environmental injustice to come here.
- Individual conversations with people where there is already trust.
- Businesses that don't recycle, think it is hippie, so I am going to start a recycling program at the business.
- Concept of apprenticeships as a new model of training the next generation of talent, target people who don't have a degree or tech background. Diversity in the community. I want to target recruitment efforts towards Indigenous populations.
- Deeper spirituality from studying and understanding Indigenous worldview, diversity of thought.
- Add taking Cherokee ceded land to our opening Creed at our faith community; include talking about broken treaty Land.
- Create a public service announcement about unfair treatment to Indigenous peoples. Have people writing to congress people. How do you go about it?
- More education on the subject—Cherokee teacher coming in to talk about generational trauma.



- Financial giving from our faith community to other organizations. SURJ (Showing up for racial Justice) meets at firestorm. Diversity alliance of Asheville.
- Interconnectivity of issues it is all connected. Decolonization is not one more issue, it is a thread in all of the issues we are dealing with. Think of how it is all connected.
- I feel stressed in the way that I feel homeless. My family was part of this land before the trail of tears. I don't know how to walk this planet without feeling homeless. I want to feel home. The more I think about this, does it become a spiritual calling to feel that sense of homelessness. Is this my heritage that I am without a legitimate homeland? Is that what the Universal Spirit would want for me?
- It is a basic human need to feel connected, and land is part of that. What I would encourage, is to not stay there and be homeless, but hold that and hold your connection to this place. Be in contemporary relationship with people of color. Find your way of working towards that. Not as a taker and colonizer, rather coming under Indigenous leadership and finding ways to make that happen. Finding home through fighting injustice.
- Answers to other questions:
- Take away addiction to coal, take the best, better transit system.
- Year, software developer, try to create an apprenticeship program. People who don't have a CS background. Jr. Dev. Level. Diversifying the tech community away from white male. Finding a way to broaden the conversation that happens the skill sets. Targeting.
- [Housing] Projects wiped away. All of us. Shared housing shared resources. Good education. Share our lives with one another.

## **Participatory Response #2—E-mail Correspondence for Lesson 5**

**Facilitator e-mail.** I want to thank all of you for all of your input throughout the last six weeks during this class. As I am bringing together all of your responses into a more complete curriculum, I found myself wanting for one more response from you. If you could this week, take 10 minutes of your time to craft a short response to our last four questions posed on week 5. I know some of you answered these in our class time, but if you would like some more space to record them here, it would be a great benefit. Your answers could also turn out to be the basis for the direction of future decolonization efforts at our faith community.

The idea posed about adding language acknowledging Cherokee land, to our normal church worship greeting was great, I thought. We could propose it as a regular thing, or something that we share at events, or even a brief statement that could lead to a more in-depth affirmation that we make officially as a worship community—much like our church’s agreement of the recent declaration of “Faith Leaders Provoking Black and Brown Justice.”

Here is what I have as a start, let me know what you think or what you might add or change:

“We acknowledge that we are standing on sacred Cherokee Land ceded through multiple broken treaties.” A follow-up sentence could be: “We recognize our complicity in settler colonialism; the inequalities, environmental degradation, and racialized ills it has created; and actively seek ways in which to live justly in this sacred Land”

Thanks again for all your input! I greatly appreciate it!

**Contributor #1.** Steps this week: To work on getting my book to an agent because it deals with colonization in relation to this country, particularly the South, particularly South

Carolina. I find this stage of the writing process to be a difficult one given my personality, but I think my work makes important points that need to be discussed.

Steps this year: Again, I think my work engages with these questions on a daily basis, year in and year out. But I need to grab the process by the horns and make my voice heard. And, of course, I need to listen, listen, listen to the voices that have been deeply harmed by colonization. I just feel like part of my calling is to speak back to my heritage, to the people who share my white skin.

Decolonization process at our faith community: I think the garden idea has something to say to this question. We do so much towards these issues already. I think we have to be certain we don't burn out. But I also think that we might not assume that helping white disabled lesbians like myself (or any other group) is necessarily helpful to Cherokee issues. I get that we can approach injustice from all sorts of angles, but what I'm trying to say is that perhaps we should focus more on particular Cherokee concerns—to ask where we might be of some help.

Dismantling of colonization here in our city: Perhaps a conversation with Cherokee leaders about what might be helpful—because I really have no idea how to even make a dent in this problem. I do think that [the participant's] statement is a nice beginning.

Really enjoyed the presentation the other day! Thank you for leading us thoughtfully through this very difficult issue.

## **Reflection on Lesson 5**

As the curriculum came to a close, I found myself encouraged by the conversation that had been started as a result of these lessons. At the same time, I was humbly coming to grips with my suspicion that five, one-hour class times would merely scratch the surface of beginning any real discussion on such an immense and complex theme. However, I think scratching the surface and sparking the conversation might have been the most valuable outcome of this project. Lesson 5 was all about informed participants sparking ideas of how to practically begin the work of material decolonization in their lives.

During this final week, I was reflecting about the structure that the working curriculum would take. Because I wished for this curriculum to develop freely and organically, I purposely did not have any strict plans of exactly how the participants would contribute or co-create their suggestions into a lesson plan. As the discussions unfolded, I began to see that the participants' unedited thoughts and reflections, as they were shared, would be the way that they would be included into the curriculum. Following my commitment to incorporate Indigenous research methodologies into this project, these unedited reflections would be similar to Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability: including people's perspectives as they shared them in the context of our discussions.

One of the most substantive, albeit small, things to come out of this week was the suggestion that our church could add a statement of recognition of the historical connections to the Land we live on. This statement would include our commitment to live justly in this Land by partnering with Indigenous communities toward decolonization. We passed on the statements mentioned in the e-mail response from Lesson 5 to the co-pastors, who are now taking into

consideration how to incorporate a similar statement into our church's worship and public declarations. In the final reflection section, I will include more positive outcomes that resulted from this project.

### **Guest Speaker**

An integral part of this curriculum is to center Indigenous leaders' voices in the conversation inviting non-Native people into the work of allied decolonization. The inclusion of the YouTube videos, made up of primarily Indigenous women as well as other women of color, were intended to partially fulfill that role. I purposefully placed the videos at the beginning of the lesson to help guide our conversation. However, I also wanted to have at least one Cherokee special guest speaker who was from our area. The one special guest speaker I had arranged ended up having to cancel for health reasons. However, I was able to invite a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, from the Qualla Boundary, just over an hour away, to be our special guest speaker. She is a social worker and sought-after speaker who teaches on historical and generational trauma.

After making all the arrangements and after our co-pastors graciously adjusted the church's adult education calendar, she came to speak. Though the topic of generational and cultural trauma was only touched on during the previous lessons, it was important for our congregation to listen to a thorough history of Indigenous peoples in the U.S.A. from a Cherokee woman from these mountains. She personalized the history, showing her familial connection to the boarding schools and how that has affected her family and community. For some of our congregation, this may have been the first personal interaction they had experienced with a member of the Cherokee community.

After the presentation, our co-pastors thanked her, provided her with a gift, and let her know that in addition to an honorarium, the church would make a donation to the Cherokee-run non-profit she works for that helps victims of historical trauma in her community. My family then took her out to lunch and I invited other members of the congregation to join us. At the lunch, we were able to informally talk deeper about decolonization and the interesting role the church can play in that. We were also able to find ways in which to begin a purposeful relationship between our church and the Cherokee community.

### **Final Reflection**

To begin my final reflection, I would like to revisit the initial questions that led me to want to create this curriculum. My first question was regarding others' past education in the area of decolonization or land education. As was covered during the lessons, though our church had been heavily involved in racial justice work and all other manner of social and environmental justice work, it seemed as though few had considered the connections between settler colonialism and the justice issues they were fighting. There were a few participants, however, that had experience in decolonization. Those participants' responses and more resources can be found in several of their e-mail responses.

My second initial question wondered what elements should be included in a five-week curriculum towards encouraging decolonization in a community. This question seemed to be answered in two ways. First, it was conveniently addressed in my pre-curriculum categorization of the topics into five areas: introduction, history, connections with social justice, connections with environmental justice, and action steps. It was also addressed by the participants' ideas for practical steps towards decolonization in our daily lives and community.

My third question was concerned with possible pitfalls, offenses, or microaggressions and if genuine decolonized engagement was possible without it being merely an attempt to reconcile settler guilt. I felt like meaningful dialogue had happened surrounding white privilege, white guilt, and common responses to “give up” in the face of the immensity of the problem. We talked about microaggressions, cultural appropriation, and the importance of educating ourselves as settlers about the problems of colonialism. Though the participants were mostly white, there were several Black participants who affirmed both the tragedy of the Colonial Triad that their people have been affected by, as well as their unknowing complicity in the settler colonial system as settlers themselves. The way that this project will not simply be empty talk is when conversations about decolonization start to affect church policy and congregants’ personal lives—something that has already begun to happen.

The last question wondered about possible outcomes of this curriculum and what practical next steps could be taken towards creating a decolonized Indigenous-settler future in my community. In my research on the topic of educating and “unsettling” settlers, this project has added a much-needed resource to the number of few existing practical curriculum resources that I have been able to find [see *Unsettling America* (2013) and *Unsettling Minnesota* (2009)]. Other faith communities or any other organization group that wishes to engage in practical decolonization would benefit from this curriculum. For example, this curriculum has served our faith community to center Indigenous voices that cry out for justice. Participants have been affected and it is hoped that this curriculum will help them make daily decisions that work towards material decolonization. One of the most unexpected results of this project has been an invitation extended to me to become a co-leader of the thriving church justice committee. I see

this as an opportunity to include a decolonization perspective in all of our church's community justice efforts.

Furthermore, this curriculum project took place at the same time as the monumentally historic gathering of hundreds of tribes of Indigenous peoples to protect the water in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux [Lakota] Tribe in North Dakota, in October 2016. This project provided curriculum participants with more understanding of the historical background and significance of this event as well. The greater denomination that our local church is connected to recently released statements showing solidarity with Standing Rock and with Indigenous peoples' rights. It feels like this curriculum was co-created at a critical point in history. After writing this project report, my committee chair, Dr. Carie Green, made known to me of a new and very relevant curriculum resource that included the input of Eve Tuck, entitled *#StandingRockSyllabus* (NYC Stands with Standing Rock Collective, 2016).

If given the opportunity to use this curriculum again, I would most likely do a few things differently. Though the curriculum was for an adult informal education hour and did not necessarily involve the inclusion of homework, I might consider next time including required or suggested readings throughout the week. Those readings could come from any number of resources including those in my literature review as well as the *Unsettling Minnesota* (2013) and *Unsettling America* (2009) curricula. For next time, I definitely would encourage a future facilitator to include the Participatory Response sections of the curriculum as required reading for the course. In other words, future participants would read what others had written, maybe also including some excerpts from *Unsettling Minnesota*; and also write their own reflections, adding to the snowball effect mentioned earlier in the paper. Though I had to fit within the limits



of the context I was in, I would suggest future facilitators provide up to two or three hours for each lesson as we always felt the discussions were cut short.

I believe this curriculum project was a success. I think it has provided ample content to begin the conversation about decolonization in a faith community. After showing a presentation of this curriculum and my reflections to both my graduate committee as well as fellow participants, the co-creators will meet once to discuss the next steps for this conversation in our faith community.

I would like to close this narrative with my response to one of our participants' e-mail, as I think it sums up what we were after in creating this curriculum.

*We are all bound up in this mess of settler colonialism. Our collective consciences are only recently awakening to the injustice of the past. . . Now that we have all become even more aware of the sacredness of Land and the historical injustices against the Cherokee people, we actually can do something about it. Cherokee people are still here, Elders still have things to say about the Land and its future. We can fund, post on social media, and be involved in many ways. Even if it takes a while to develop a meaningful friendship with a knowledgeable member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, you can educate others, educate yourself and practice holistic social and environmental justice in everyday life.*



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## Appendix A

### Curriculum Project Timeline

Dates	Action	Notes
8/15/16 – 9/10/16	Create the Curriculum	Print out any necessary readings or questions for class on recycled paper
9/11	First Lesson (1/2 hour)	-History and Definitions of (De)Colonization
9/25	-Second Lesson	-Interconnectivity of Decolonization and Social Justice
10/2	-Third Lesson	-Interconnectivity of Decolonization and Environmental Activism
10/9	-Fourth Lesson	- Practical Settler Steps Towards Allied Decolonization
10/18	-Special Guest Speaker	-Presentation about generational trauma from Cherokee leader
9/18-10/21	Analyze Findings using PAR	-I was collectively analyzing the input of each week with the participants via reflective questions, discussion, and suggestions for action points. Though I ultimately authored the narrative that ended up being the final report, I included participant input throughout.
10/28	First Draft of Final Report	-I took notes and updated my bibliography during the entire process of the curriculum project.
11/11	Final Draft of Report	
12/06	Master's Project Defense	
TBA December	Present Project presentation before participants	First "Decolonization" Committee Meeting. Possible group name to be created in participatory action.

## Appendix B

### Unsettling Minnesota Excerpt

#### Desire to Belong: Reflections as a Settler Searching for Sense of Place

For many years now I have struggled with the question of belonging. I felt a lack of significant connection to a place called home. I grew up dreaming of travel and faraway places—confident that I belonged somewhere and that this fantasy land waited for me to find it. I've spent the last five years between Minneapolis and wandering across oceans, borders, highways and train tracks, hoping that somewhere would make sense.

Eventually, I always ended up back in Minneapolis—seeking what I understood to be home, for the familiarity of the snow and pine. Yet, after a few months, I would again grow frustrated with what was around me. I began to feel panicked and stagnant. I did not feel the connection I desired, so I left again.

As I continued to put new cities and places behind me, I began to understand that a sense of place and belonging were not waiting for me somewhere else. The problem would not be solved simply by running away when a place failed to meet my desires and longing. I realized that my sense of place in Minneapolis was founded in the concrete and brick structures of a colonized place. I would miss the familiarity of its sidewalks and faces. I would miss the ability to expertly navigate myself through the constructed city I knew not just by sight, but by sound and smell. I return to Minneapolis for these things, the only things that I know well. Yet there is a superficiality that permeates this notion of home. I grow frustrated and disappointed by the community I know here and imagine that surely I would find a better fit elsewhere. The concrete is suffocating, it is inanimate; I feel nothing to ground or connect myself to. I have no

connection to the actual land of Minnesota; I only desire it. Through my wandering I have learned that I am not just seeking to learn and see, but also what I identify as seeking to claim for my own. I seek and desire to claim a connection to land. What does it mean when I, as a settler on occupied land, desire to belong to this land?

A couple of years ago, I remember wanting to learn the Dakota language in order to ‘understand the land’ better. I identified Minnesota as my home and sense of place, but there was a large void—I did not feel the connection and belonging one would associate with home. I thought that if I learned Dakota and spent more time away from the cities, I would learn to ‘understand’ Minnesota better and would feel like I knew that place well. I wanted to connect myself to Minnesota and the way I saw to do this was to take from Dakota culture. At the time, I understood this to be a positive thing; I thought it was important for Minnesotans to learn Dakota as a way to depart from colonialism in order to develop a healthier, significant, positive relationship with the land.

It never occurred to me that perhaps I should not have access to the Dakota language; I simply assumed I was entitled to it. I never thought to question why a white settler like myself can so easily have access to Dakota language. I thought that by “learning” Dakota culture, I could move away from settler society. I failed to understand that I was re-enacting colonization and that my desires were intrinsic to settler society. What I desire and seek to claim on this land are acts of colonization as long as I remain unaccountable to my settler identity.

I want to claim that connection, belonging and identity for myself because I do not have it and I imagine myself entitled to it. I seek to belong because I do not belong. I never considered that I did not belong because of a history of conquest, genocide, and displacement. Nor did it

occur to me that I didn't belong because the land remains occupied by colonialist power that I benefit from, or because of the fact that my ability to call this land home is dependent on the continued displacement and repression of Dakota people. The colonizer in me did not see these things as the issue, but rather assumed that I belong here. I thought: "of course this is home and I am entitled to it". The answer to my alienation was to take more from the people who have had everything taken from them in order for me to be here.

I imagine that most settlers, like myself, share this sense of disconnection. In our quest for belonging, perhaps many of us have resorted to long stretches of aimless wandering. Many of us have also turned to cultural and spiritual appropriation of indigenous cultures. Taking from indigenous cultures as a settler is not cultural exchange; because it takes place within the violent constructs of colonization and colonial power, it is cultural appropriation.

When I sought to connect and belong to Minnesota, I was acting from the colonial values of claim through dominance and assertion. I took without asking because colonial society taught me that I have a claim and a right to what I desire. I did not have to ask because it is already mine. I never thought that I should have asked to learn Dakota language or culture, because colonial society has claimed it as its own property . . . Spiritual and cultural traditions are a physical, mental and spiritual part of individuals and peoples. When people are stripped of their land, home, language and identity—when a people has been subjugated to genocide, rape and incarceration for the benefit of my sense of place—and I then decide that I have a right to that people's language, culture, spirituality—that is an acute act of violence. When I as a colonizer decide that a person's spiritual and cultural identity is something they do not have claim or ownership over and that I can take it without asking, I am exploiting not only that culture but the

people it belongs too. I am disempowering people, silencing voices, and diminishing identities. I am violating people in a way that goes beyond a simple aggression; I am perpetrating deep mental and physical violence. For a settler to take that identity for themselves is violence so personal, mental, physical and spiritual that it becomes a form of sexual violence, of rape.

I cannot seek a sense of home and belonging on this land without being accountable to my settler identity and actively working towards decolonization. The colonizer in me sought to claim, romanticize and pervert indigenous cultures into my own making as a way of legitimizing my place on this land. I do not know how to belong absent of colonial desires because it is colonization that allows me to be here. I have learned now that my sense of belonging lies in my commitment to dismantling my own colonial mentalities and dismantling colonial power. Because colonization so heavily marks my identity, I cannot seek any sort of connection or home without confronting this identity. As long as colonial power and society is in place, I cannot seek home without dismantling my colonial mentality.

Settler society leaves a large void because there is no significant connection or belonging to the places we occupy. We further perpetrate violence and oppression by failing to identify that this is a result of how we came to be on this land, and the colonial systems we participate in and benefit from. My sense of place lies in the dismantlement of my own colonial mentalities. This includes understanding my own cultural identity, by learning that I do come from somewhere and connecting to that. By being honest about where I come from and how I came to be here, I do not seek to appropriate other cultures for my own as a way to feel connection. By being accountable within my community, and my community being accountable to me, we create the

sustainability to actually be in solidarity with other communities and affect actual deconstruction of colonial power (Unsettling Minnesota, 2009, p. 54-56).